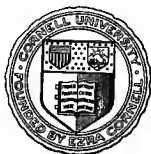


The
TRIUMPH

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THE TRIUMPH

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[See page 383]

"LEAVE YOU? HOW ABSURD!" ANNE GULPED. "I'LL STAY WITH
YOU IF THEY KILL ME"

THE TRIUMPH

A Novel

BY

WILL N. HARBEN

AUTHOR OF

"ARNER DANIEL" "ANN BOYD"

"SECOND CHOICE" ETC.



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MR. HARBEN'S GEORGIA FICTION

FROM AN APPRECIATION By W. D. HOWELLS

Courtesy of the North American Review

OF all our localists, as I may call the type of American writers whom I think the most national, no one has done things more expressive of the life he was born to than Mr. Harben. He was known by his sketches and stories of northern Georgia before he conceived the notion of portraying his old neighborhoods in the dimensions of that sort of human comedy which every writer attempts sooner or later. But some ten years since he gave a hostage to criticism in fiction of mature stature and manly make, which he has redeemed again and again by his subsequent novels.

His people talk as if they had not been in books before, and they talk all the more interestingly because they have for the most part not been "in society," or ever will be. They express themselves, without straining for dialect, in the neighborly parlance which their experience and their observation have not transcended, and they express themselves with a fury of fun, of pathos and profanity which is native to their region.

In all the countries the Southerner seems to be the same in his difference from the Northerner, but in our own

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South the average man has been characterized by the habit of slavery, and this habit still lingers, after the fact of slavery, in the violence of the whites toward one another and their obduracy toward the negroes. For the most part Mr. Harben's northern Georgians are of the poor white class who were not slaveholders, but who seem to have more than halved the slaveholders' contempt and cruelty in their attitude toward the subject race. They are small farmers who till their own land; they are pioneers; they are backwoodsmen almost in the hunting and trapping stage; they are illicit distillers; they are traders, tending by instinct to the mountain towns, where they enter commercial life with an ambition for the great business activity of Atlanta, their metropolis. The storekeeper is the plutocrat of the region, not surpassed in social dignity by the lawyer; he is the ultimate equal of the obsolescent aristocrat, the man of old family, without ceasing to be the friend and neighbor of the mountaineer farmer who trades with him and guards a jealous pride even in the toils of mortgage. In all Mr. Harben's stories some type of this mercantile magnate occurs; he is the new force, and very interesting in his relation to the strength of the ancient conservatism. The equality to which he lends himself, and which seems to shape the whole social fabric, is more formal than real, but still it is truer equality than ever pervaded the New England village life. In fact, whatever equality is rife among us in the enormous disparity of fortunes is from the South rather than the North, where the ideal was always liberty, a barren and effectless thing without equality.

The mountain folk who live in the books of the novelist almost as palpably as in the shadow of their native woods

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or on the slopes of their rocky hills, in the log cabin of the pioneer times, or the yet ruder and more provisional shack of the first settler, or the unfinished frame house of the universal American farmer, are far simpler people than the village merchants. Their days are divided between killing toil and wild riot, and their virtues are of the same excess as their vices. It is a condition in which religion holds the sway it seems to have lost elsewhere; the man who is not a church member is a lost soul even in this life; and the preacher is of a mystical power and influence unknown in civilized communities. He is a frequent figure in the stories, and the author has not hesitated to show him sometimes brutal, cruel in his fanaticism, and sometimes coarse even to the verge of indecency. The passions are lords among these primitive people: avarice, envy, hate, revenge, lust, ambition, rule the men of Mr. Harben's Georgian mountaineers as they rule Mr. Phillpotts's Devonshire moormen, and the like sort of virulent pietism passes for religion among both. But there is not wanting to either a depth of conscience, a power of good-will, which transforms their creeds to a faith of sublime effect. One notable difference is that the mountaineers know nothing of the corroding doubts of the moormen, who are sometimes turned from Christians to agnostics by the subtle and far-reaching intimations of modern science.

It is a check only too feeble when the passions are astir, and especially when the homicidal fury breaks out in the lonely fields or the shabby village streets. Then the old grudges are fought to the death with rifle or pistol, and the point of honor, inflamed by real or fancied insult, goads kindly men to sudden murder. The sum of bloodshed in these books is perhaps greater than the

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sum of any other fact, but it would be unjust to the people among whom it mounts to such awful massacre not to realize, from the author's witness, that they have a real sense of homicide. More than one case of lifelong remorse lends its tragic gloom to his page, and is not the less affecting because it is expressed in natures of primitive simplicity, influenced by faith of child-like implicitness.

Each of his stories moves from some strong central impulse, and is in a way, not too obvious, epical. In his diction and in his conception of a superficial character he is often prosaic enough, but in his psychological moments he is a poet of genuine quality. He makes no apparent effort to lift his material into a light where it will be more imaginable to readers of a higher civilization; you take it on the level where he finds it or not at all. In fact, it is hard to say how much or little he is himself detached from it in his ideals; but it may be a "good fault" of his unconsciousness that he sometimes seems trammelled in his conditions and might be accused of admiring the things that his characters admire. Yet when it comes to any test this ethical sense is unclouded, and he holds the balance between right and wrong with a steady hand. He does not fail of justice to the worst and meanest of the people he portrays, and the effect of his justice is so convincing that you must accept his portrait as a study of conditions uncommon if not unsurpassed in Anglo-Saxon literature.

It is not part of my purpose to instance or analyze his different books. They are of one quality, though not one unvarying quality such as derives from reality. He seldom loses himself in the factitious, and I should say at a go that he never loses himself in it when he is por-

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traying the character of women. His women are all of a life-likeness so convincing that you may, or may not, surprise yourself at last in the belief that the redemption of the South from the long delirium of slavery will be through the political importance of women. The recognition of this importance must come everywhere; when it comes to the women of the South, it will find them fitted for their old rights and their new duties as few other women in the world are fitted. The unrivaled freedom of Southern women, in all the avatars of womanhood from girlhood on, has given them power elsewhere unknown, with a trust from men that is almost pathetically entire (save for the jealousy inherent in Southern natures), and exalted by an ideal of chivalry vain and weak enough, but not ignoble. I do not think of any woman in Mr. Harben's fiction who is misimagined or imagined from a false conception of her relation to man. She is often enough in that world, as in this, silly, vain, false, vacillating; but she is also true, brave, good, and constant, quite beyond the merit of the men who love her. I should not wish to instance Ann Boyd, in the novel of that name, as a faultlessly heroic character, but it is hard to keep from calling her sublime in the successive developments of her nature, which are always toward the light given her by experience. What one may safely say is that she is a great creature, and if she never was, that she is most worthy to have been. I say this, reserving my regret that in a last most difficult moment she is lent to the necessities of a melodramatic situation which does not seem to me a necessity of the author.

But, after all, though we may admire and enjoy Mr. Harben's success with individual figures, it is his power of handling conditions and imparting a sense of social

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situation that is most to be valued. His corner of that strange "new South," which is still for us such a *terra incognita* after our many inquiries and conjectures, is alive with what we feel to be genuine interests and real emotions. The past is shown us interpenetrated not only with the present, but with the future; novel and bold enterprises are turning from dreams to actions, and the people of an ante-feudal civilization are seizing their significance with an avidity and strength, and adapting them to their ideals with an eagerness and intelligence not surpassed in communities more consciously modern. Together with these effects are the lingering superstitions and the fading illusions of other days, and often amid the latter-day actualities of Mr. Harben's scene we come upon the affirmations of the mistaken Confederate patriotism, which cannot accept the conclusions it cannot hope to question. This has its pathos, its dignity. At the same time one reflects that even failure cannot consecrate error.

PART I

THE TRIUMPH

CHAPTER I

THOMAS MERLIN, Georgian planter and slave-owner, drove along the main country road in a closed carriage of a rather old-fashioned type. His most trusted slave, Larkin, a slender, middle-aged mulatto, wearing a black frock-suit and a beaver hat, sat on the high front seat and skilfully drove the spirited pair of bays over the rough corduroy road which was flanked on either side by promising fields of young corn, wheat, and cotton, with here and there a patch of sugar-cane or a level meadow given over to the growing of hay.

Now and then, as he smoked his cigar, the planter would glance out of the open window and nonchalantly nod in response to the doffed hats of the blacks at work with hoe or plow in the corn or cotton rows on the roadside, or order Larkin to stop that he might speak to some overseer on horseback whom he met. He could afford to be contemptuous of the small farms through which he was passing, for he was noted as the chief slave- and land-owner of the county.

Since early manhood, and he was now near forty-five, he had been considered a most fortunate individual. He had neither inherited his property nor made it by his own exertions. He had come of a plain and poor family of uneducated mountain people, but, unlike his only brother

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Andrew, and two sisters, he had striven to obtain a college education, and gained his desire by the aid of a benevolent gentleman who, being childless, had become interested in the ambitious youth. Thomas Merlin's early aim had been the practice of law, but just after being admitted to the bar he married a rather unattractive young woman who was an heiress to the property he now controlled. Children had been born to him who were as obedient to his will as were his wife and acquired human property. He had represented his county in the Legislature, had been elected to the State Senate, and was now a magistrate in his own district. He had never been a truckler to the ordinary vote, trusting to certain fawning friends to manipulate the campaigns with funds easily obtainable from his wife's purse. And yet there were times when he was as badly in need of ready money as the average man, for he was what was sometimes termed "land and slave poor." Indeed, the frown of anxiety now on his face—it was dark, handsome, and cold—was due to certain pressing needs concerning which he was then on his way to the village of Delbridge to see his brother Andrew, under whose advice and with whom he had invested a considerable sum of money. The investment seemed to have taken an unfavorable turn, and he was losing faith in his brother's judgment. Moreover, he had been angered by reports which had come to him from many directions concerning Andrew's stand on the question of slaveholding, which was then agitating the country from end to end, and Thomas told himself that if he and Andrew were to discuss the business in hand in a friendly manner political matters must be avoided.

He was soon entering the straggling suburbs of the village of Delbridge by one of the numerous red-clay roads which met in the Square like the spokes of a great wheel with the surrounding green hills for a tire. The main feature of the Square was a big red-brick building

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in its center with a diminutive bell-tower on the roof. This was the county court-house, and the four streets around it were occupied by stores, warehouses, a hotel, post-office, shops, and lawyers' offices, mostly one-story frame buildings with unsightly wooden sheds in front, under which the storekeepers and lawyers sat without their coats, for the weather was warm and sultry. Passing through the Square, Larkin was about to turn off into a side-street to a livery-stable when his master checked him.

"Drive on," he said. "I think my brother has stable room down there. He doesn't keep more than one or two horses now, I'm told."

Without a word of response, as was the habit of well-trained servants of that period, Larkin whipped up his horses, and the carriage rumbled along the unpaved street, which was in as bad condition as any of the roads over which he had driven. Down the main residential street they went, passing unpretentious houses till they drew up in front of a large two-story frame house which had a long veranda with round white columns and dingy green shutters to the windows. The house was sorely in need of fresh paint, and the front steps were in a bad condition, as was the paling fence surrounding the property. There was a level lawn of stunted grass reaching from the house to the fence, on which stood a vine-grown summer-house, shade trees of several sorts, and some desultory flower-pots which had the appearance of being long neglected.

Alighting from the carriage without waiting for Larkin to open the door, and holding a small valise in his hand, the planter peered beyond the house toward the stable in the rear. "Drive around there," he ordered. "Unharness the horses, and water and feed them. Go to the kitchen and wait. I'll let you know when I want to go back."

A tipping of the hat was the slave's only response, and Merlin passed through the sagging gate to the brick walk

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which led to the house, fifty yards away. He was tall, slender, and stylishly clad in clothing and shoes of the period which fitted him perfectly. He wore a heavy brown mustache, a goatee, and had a fine head of curling hair which he wore rather long and which was quite becoming to him.

Reaching the door, which was closed, he found that there was no bell, and so with his gold-headed ebony cane he rapped on the shutter.

"I'll bet he doesn't keep a servant," Thomas mused. "It would be just like him, after all he has said against slavery, and white help can't be had by men of his sort, I'm sure."

Presently the door was opened by a young girl who was quite slender, pretty, blue-eyed, and intelligent-looking, with long golden hair worn in a plait down her back.

"Ah!" the visitor exclaimed, "it is Anne. How are you, my child? My! how you have grown since last winter! Young lady now, eh?"

Anne smiled sweetly as she took his hat, cane, and valise and put them on the hat-rack in the wide, empty-looking, uncarpeted hall. "Not yet, I hope," she answered, in a dignified tone. "Mother saw you from the window and said ask you into the parlor. My father hasn't got home from New York yet. We are expecting him every minute. The train must be late."

"Why, I thought that he arrived yesterday!" Thomas said, in surprise. "He wrote me from New York that he would be here sure."

"We thought so, too, at first," Anne explained, "but we got another letter saying he was delayed by the business he was attending to for you and himself."

A frown overcast the stern features of the planter, but he said nothing more, and his niece withdrew. From an open window, which looked out on the back yard, he saw Anne join her brother Robert, a slender, ungainly lad

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two years younger than herself, who was playing with a crude hand-made bow and arrow and a cardboard target placed on the trunk of an apple-tree near by. Thomas shuddered sensitively at the sight of the boy, for he was all but disreputable in appearance, being barefooted, coatless, and wearing a shirt that was almost in rags and decidedly unclean. He had on an old straw hat with holes in the crown through which tufts of his unkempt hair protruded.

"You've got to go clean up," he heard Anne say, sharply. "Uncle Tom is here and you mustn't be seen looking like that. You are dirtier and more ragged than any nigger he owns. You know how neat and clean Cousin George and Cousin Fred always are, and you must not disgust uncle while he is here. Slip up-stairs the back way and put on your Sunday clothes."

"All right, after a while." The boy was sighting along the reed arrow into the split end of which he had fastened a piece of china after the manner of the flint used by the Indians.

The attention of the visitor was now drawn to the door, for his sister-in-law was coming. "How are you, Thomas?" she asked, entering and approaching, a work-hardened hand extended as he rose to meet her.

"Quite well, Ruth," he responded. "How are you?"

"Very well, thank you," she returned, taking a chair and smiling in an embarrassed way. "I'm sorry 'Drew is not here yet, for I know how anxious you are about that business."

"Yes, of course," he returned, "and you may be sure I was glad to get his letter about our improved prospects. He was on the point of making an absolute sale. Do you think it is likely that it fell through, after all?"

"I was wondering myself," she answered. "He wrote me only a few days ago that everything was in good shape

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and promising, but his next letter simply said that he was coming home and that he would explain it all then."

"I am afraid he has missed it again." The planter fumbled with his heavy black necktie and nervously brushed his hair back from his brow. "Just now I happen to stand in very urgent need of money, Ruth, and you know he and I are equal partners in the quarry. I went into it to make money, I admit that, of course. He showed me samples of the marble and told me that he was sure he could sell it to wealthy dealers in New York, and I trusted to his judgment and put all the ready money I could raise into it. For two years now he has been going back and forth to New York and nothing has been done. The property cost us ten thousand dollars, and his last letter stated that he was very apt to close out for fifty thousand cash down. That is a nice sum, and naturally I am anxious about it. Andrew is a plain, uneducated man, but it struck me that just such an individual might succeed in selling a property like that. City men are apt to think they are getting a bargain when it comes through such a man as 'Drew. Do you know, those men up there are no fools. Andrew, perhaps, doesn't know it, but I'm pretty sure that they sent an expert down here to look the property over. I heard of a well-dressed stranger being there two weeks ago who seemed to have no business of any sort."

The conversation lagged. Presently Thomas fixed his eyes on her face. "Somehow," he resumed, "it has always seemed to me that you yourself have never had much faith in the deal."

He noticed the almost imperceptible shrug of her slight shoulders, and her blue eyes seemed to avoid his own. "'Drew never told me much about it," she said, giving a little toss to her head. "I reckon he thinks I haven't enough business sense to understand it. I suppose it is costing you both a lot of money?"

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"Well, I can't say that it is, in one way, at least," the planter laughed. "'Drew has been able, rough and uneducated though he is, to get along without the aid of a lawyer up there; and as for his expenses, they are ridiculously small. He spends next to nothing while on the trains, and when in New York he puts up at the very cheapest boarding-houses."

"That is because you are sharing the expenses," Mrs. Merlin said, wearily. "He is very conscientious about such things. He has told me several times about little things on that line that came up which he would not mention to you."

"Oh, he is working cheaply enough! And if he rakes in that fifty thousand dollars it will be a glorious help to us both. I happen to be in a terribly tight place financially just now, Ruth. I am in debt. I could get out all right if I'd sell some of the negroes, but that would break my wife's heart. You know her father never sold a slave in his life, and we have all he left us—and their natural increase, besides. We have too many, of course, as things are now, but we can't help it. So you see why I am so anxious to have 'Drew put this thing through. By the way, you don't keep a servant of any sort, do you?"

Again there was the weary shrug and toss of the head. "No, Anne and I do everything, with Bob's help about the yard, such as cutting the wood and feeding the horse and cow. When I was sick last winter I hired a daughter of old Sam Long—Jane, his oldest girl—to do general housework and washing and ironing while I was off my feet during that spell, but she was more bother than she was worth. You know the Prestons next door have a lot of negroes and they teased the life out of her. They called her 'po' white trash' and sneered and laughed and sang songs after her whenever she was in sight. She stood it as long as she could and then went home. I don't blame her a bit. I wouldn't have stayed as long as she did."

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"'Drew is able to own one or two slaves, and it is foolish of him not to do so even if he *is* opposed to slavery in general," the planter said. "When you are in Rome you ought to do as the Romans do. I was teasing him the last time I was here"—Thomas laughed, reminiscently—"about the mortgage he holds on the negro Colonel Wilmot put up as security for the money he borrowed from him. I told him that holding a mortgage on a slave was every bit as bad as owning the slave outright."

"'Drew is not to blame for that," Mrs. Merlin said, firmly. "Colonel Wilmot borrowed the two thousand dollars without any security at all, for you know he was once considered good for any amount. But all at once his affairs got in such a tangled shape that 'Drew was advised to get security. The negro, Joe, was all the colonel had to offer, and 'Drew was compelled to accept it or lose the whole thing. Take my word for it, Thomas, that one transaction has bothered him more than anything else in the world. You are not the only one who teases him about it. He never mentions abolition without somebody throwing that nigger mortgage up to him. You may be sure if he could afford it he would free the slave and be done with it all."

"He'd make a fool of himself if he did," the planter said, frowning. "This community wouldn't stand for an act like that in its present ferment. Big planters in Virginia have done it, but slave sentiment is not as strong there as it is here. Those of us who own negroes are doing the best we can, and if my own brother were to take a step like that, with the slur it would cast on me and my class, I should never forgive him."

"I certainly hope," sighed Mrs. Merlin, "that you and he will never have another dispute over the question. You are entirely different in every way. I don't know which is right, I am sure."

Merlin was about to make some response when she

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rose and went to the door and glanced up the stairs. "Anne has fixed your room," she announced, rather timidly. "You may be dusty from your drive. Will you go up now?"

He accepted the invitation, and took his valise with him to the room above. "Please let me know when 'Drew comes," were his parting words as he ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER II

THAT afternoon Andrew Merlin arrived from New York. Having no carriage or servant, and being accustomed to wait on himself, no one went to the station to meet him, so he trudged through the streets alone, carrying a large carpet-bag, a parcel wrapped in brown paper which contained some unlaundered underclothing, and a most disreputable umbrella which had once been black, but had faded to a dingy green. He had a round face with high cheek-bones, was above medium height, broad-shouldered, with rather slender limbs, clean-shaven, and had shrewd, dark eyes set close together. He wore a beaver hat, bell-shaped, which was fuzzy, worn bare in places and badly dented. His coat was a wrinkled black broadcloth frock which reached to his knees. The thread-bare lapels were splotched and stained by tobacco juice, and his trousers bulged out at the knees and were frayed at the bottom of the legs. His shoes were broad and heavy. He suffered from a deformity of his little toes, which lapped over their longer neighbors, necessitating the wearing of a very easy shoe. When the shoes were new he often slit the tight places with his penknife. His hair was rather heavy and was usually roached high and carelessly combed at any odd moment with a horn comb which closed like a razor and was carried in an upper vest pocket.

The two brothers met on the veranda and shook hands under a queer sort of restraint, which was perhaps due to their widely differing temperaments and positions in

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life. Andrew had put down his carpet-bag, but still clutched his parcel and umbrella. His wife came forward promptly and he shook hands with her, this also in a restrained way. He sometimes kissed her, but never in the presence of any one. His children, Robert and Anne, came forward—the boy now neatly dressed—and he shook hands with them with the same sort of awkward formality, though his brother thought that he looked at them both with warm, paternal interest.

"Your dinner is waiting for you," his wife said. "I saw you coming, and put it on the table. We've all had ours."

"And I'm ready for it, if anybody ever was," Andrew laughed. "I'll go in and fill up, Tom, and then talk to you about that—that matter. I can see that you are anxious to know about it."

"Yes, I'll wait," the planter said, with a fixed stare. "I'll wait out here till you are through."

Alone on the veranda, for the others had followed Andrew to the dining-room, Thomas strode back and forth restlessly. "Why didn't he come out with it?" he asked himself, uneasily. "Was it because he didn't want to mention it before the others? I wonder if I am to be disappointed again, after he has raised my hopes this way. Surely he ought to know that in my frame of mind, deviled as I am on all sides, I ought not to be kept in suspense while he is eating his dinner. Something has gone wrong. I saw it in his eye. He didn't look like a man who had put a big cash deal through. My God! What will I do if I don't get some money?"

The ten or fifteen minutes which elapsed seemed an hour to the anxious planter, and finally, when he heard the chairs sliding back in the dining-room, he went into the hall and met his brother. Andrew's glance shifted unsteadily as he met the planter's stare.

"Come in the parlor," he said, heavily. "We can talk

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better there. I reckon you are anxious to get started back home. That is a pert drive in hot weather like this."

Thomas did not sit down at once, though his brother did, but remained standing, the look of suspense hardening on his face.

"Sit down, sit down; take it easy," Andrew said, with a little labored laugh. "Say, you and me are awful different, as different as a speckled pea and a white grain o' corn. I have never made anything in my life without moving slow, while you jump at everything hit or miss like a duck after a June-bug."

"I think I know what you are driving at," Thomas fumed. "After all you wrote the other day you have failed again."

"Huh! thar you go already!" Andrew smiled, as he took from his vest pocket a small piece of very dark plug-tobacco and prepared to bite off a corner of it. "Catch your bug and choke it down. La me! you could learn a lesson from them long-sighted, cool-headed Yankee speculators up thar. They are never in a hurry to close a deal. They will lie low like a cat at a rat-hole for years and be perfectly sure they will win the game some day or other."

"So the thing fell through, after all?" said the planter, seating himself, his long fingers nervously clasping the arch of his high-heeled boot.

"It did, and it didn't, if you know what that means," said the tobacco-chewer, stolidly. "Whar I made my big mistake was in writing you that the thing was so nigh settlement. Well, I thought it was, and it wasn't my fault that it fell through. By gum! you fellers down here with your velvet collars, fluted shirts, and droves of niggers are more to blame than me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Listen, and I'll tell you. We had the thing all cocked and primed for a transfer and was ready to swap deeds

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and money last Tuesday. McCormack had us all get together in his room at his hotel down-town at three o'clock. Oh, it was fine! Thar was ten of us, all in it. Mac ordered the whisky, and they had me mix 'em a mint-julep. I don't know how you highfalutin chaps make 'em exactly, but I made a stab at it and it was good, I reckon, for they kept swiggin' at it till they was all red in the face and unsteady in their motions. Ever now and then Mac would call 'em to order, but they was powerful slow gettin' down to business. They wanted to crack jokes and sing funny songs. Then the worst thing that could have taken place happened. Thar was one fellow in the bunch that was a rank copperhead. Drunk or sober, he always wanted to halt business to talk ag'in' the abolition movement, and what fine blue blood you fellers that own niggers have in your veins, and he never could see why I wasn't as much interested as he was. Me and him has come nigh to blows many a time. On my word, he was hotter ag'in' the North than anybody here. Well, full o' my julep, he wanted to crawl over the table and start the war right thar. I took a lot, but I couldn't take all he said. I won't say what I did, for I don't want to brag, but I did enough to him. They drug us apart. They had to, I reckon. As it was, the proprietor of the hotel sent word up from the office that we had to stop our racket or get out."

"My God! and that is the way you attend to important business!" Thomas cried, angrily. "You are not only a disgrace to the South, but—"

"Stop! that's just about what that feller said, Tom, and me and him hitched. You and me are brothers, but I won't take insults here in my own house from kin or stranger. You remember what happened betwixt me and you in the field when we was boys. Now if you want to hear the rest of this thing you must bridle your tongue."

The planter was white with rage, but he said nothing,

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and his brother continued: "Well, that started a big war talk amongst 'em all, and by gum! I just set thar and seed our prospects leak out like water from a sun-dried barrel. Even Mac got afraid, it looked like, for one of 'em, a cool-headed chap that wasn't much drunk, made a speech, and said that as shore as winter followed summer, war was comin' betwixt North and South, and that the market for marble would be as flat as a flitter an' tied up for years to come. Gravestones would be the only things needed, an' nobody could pay for them. Lord! I could 'a' choked 'im! You never witnessed such a change in a lot o' men in yore life. They agreed then and thar to wait developments and practically said if thar was war they wouldn't buy, and if thar wasn't they would. So you see, thar wasn't anything fer me to do but to pack up and come home."

Thomas was still white in the face and frowning. "I won't say what I want to say about your stand on slavery. I'm too disgusted with you to talk about it. I will only speak as one man to another about this business. I put that money in on your judgment, and it is practically lost."

"That is whar we differ," Andrew answered, mildly. "I've got like Yankee speculators to some extent, by associatin' with 'em, I reckon, and I haven't lost faith in that big bed o' fine white marble. All this political business will pass, either with or without war, and in the end we will make a sale. Who knows? Maybe we'll get a better price then than now."

"I need about five thousand dollars," the planter blurted out. "You believe in this investment, and I don't. Will you buy me out?"

"Good gracious! Tom, you hain't in earnest, are you?" Andrew stopped chewing, went to the fireplace, removed a gaudy paper-covered screen, swung it to one side and spat between two rusty dog-irons, then replacing the

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screen carefully, he came back, his mild, almost pain-filled eyes on his brother.

"I never was more in earnest in my life," said Thomas. "Wilks and Howe say they cannot furnish me any longer, and will close down on me if they are not paid for last year's supplies. I told them I was expecting money from you—in fact, they are waiting for you to help me arrange payment."

"I see, I see," Andrew frowned. "Well, that is bad, Tom, but it was because I was tryin' to help you make a big chunk o' money that I got you into this. I don't know who I could get to take yore interest. Money is scarce and you know how I'm fixed. The mortgage I hold on nigger Joe is all I have except some plots of land here and thar which couldn't be sold at a minute's notice. Colonel Wilmot is treatin' Joe well, and my conscience don't bother me on that score, but I would like to return yore money to you. I am sure you will wish you had held on in the end, but you know best. I'll look around and see if anything can be done, but to tell you the truth it seems hopeless. War talk has unsettled everything. I'm for peace first, last, and always. You see, I know that a mere handful o' you fellers down here without guns an' ammunition can't buck ag'in' a big thing like this glorious Republic. You hain't been about as much as I have, and so you don't know the lay o' the land. You say I don't love my country. It is because I *do* love it that I hate to see it spanked like a baby across its mammy's knee."

"They are cowards and thieves!" The planter stood up. "What right have *they* to tell us how to run our affairs? We'll march over them like a mad tornado." He was now snorting in rage, and fairly panting.

"Huh!" Andrew was growing angry also, "it is just such empty-pated, hot-skulled fools as you, Tom, that want to drench this land in blood, and you will succeed if you are allowed sway amongst the young men of this

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country. You want your boys and mine to plunge into it, don't you? You want 'em to turn ag'in' their country and git shot full o' holes, don't you? And why? I'll bet you never did set still one single minute and ask yourself what really is at the bottom o' all this fuss. The long and short of it is that the Lord God Almighty has planted in the breasts o' *some* folks the idea that every human being is entitled to an equal chance to live out his days on earth, and slave-ownin' will have to go, for you know, and I know, that yore wife's niggers hain't got the same chance in the pursuit of happiness as yore sons. Understand me, I don't think them Yankees are one bit more Christian than you fellows down here. The shoe is on t'other foot, that's all. If they owned the niggers they would take yore stand p'int-blank, but they don't, an' so they are ready to take 'em from you by peaceful means, if possible, or force if they have to use it."

Here Thomas turned and strode to the front door. His servant was in the yard, and Andrew heard him call out in a harsh, rasping voice, "Hitch up and drive around; I'm ready!"

Andrew rose and went to him, a sheepish look on his round face. "You hain't goin' off like this, are you?" he faltered, the flush of his own anger resolving itself into red and white splotches on his brow and cheeks. "Looks like a pity for me an' you always to end up in a row. We oughtn't to 'a' got on this subject, nohow. You wouldn't be so mad, anyway, if you hadn't been so set back over our big deal missin' fire."

"I won't stay in any man's house who holds the views you do," fumed the planter. "Let me give you a piece of advice. The people here have stood as much as they are going to stand to from your tongue, and they will simply tar and feather you, and ride you out of the town on a fence rail, if you keep it up."

"They will, will they?" Andrew's white splotches were

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vanishing, "and what would that prove but my contention that nigger-ownin' has killed all ideas of divine justice and freedom of opinion? Why shouldn't I be allowed to say what I think on a matter of right and wrong? Does a feller have to hold certain views because his neighbors do? I may have been with Yankees so much that I've got some Yankee notions, I don't know, but I've got 'em. You treat yore niggers all right—fine, splendid, and I doubt if a single one could be paid to leave you, but it is the odd case that counts—the abuse that the system permits now and then. But you've had enough o' my talk, already, and so—"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of his wife. "Thomas, you are not really going off mad, are you?" she pleaded.

"Oh, I'm all right!" the planter responded. "I must be going, anyway. I have to stop and see Wilks and Howe at their warehouse."

"You two never seem to be able to agree," Mrs. Merlin sighed. "For brothers you act very oddly."

"Oh, Tom's all right now." Andrew forced a smile to his twitching lips. "Well, if you have to go I won't beg you to stay, for I know you want to see Wilks and Howe. I'll look around and see if I can possibly help you sell your interest in the marble, but I don't see much chance."

Thomas saw the carriage approaching, and went up to his room to get his valise.

"You oughtn't to have brought up that subject again," Mrs. Merlin said, plaintively, to her husband.

"I couldn't help it," Andrew answered, spitting over the edge of the veranda floor. "You needn't advise me, Ruth. You don't know how I feel about it—nobody does but me. I know one thing, and that is that I feel as the Lord made me feel, and that is the end of it."

CHAPTER III

LEAVING his brother's house, the planter drove to the store of the merchants who had been furnishing supplies to his plantation. It was on the Square adjoining a large public wagon-yard. Wide platforms of heavy planks were at the end and side of the adjoining warehouse, on which, under sheds, were heaped great piles of cotton in bales, wool in bags, and grain in sacks. Here and there were wagons and buggies, crated and uncrated, and every known agricultural implement.

Alighting at the front door, the planter started in.

"Where is Howe?" he asked of a bookkeeper who was coming out with a bank depositor's pass-book and a stack of currency in his hands.

"On the side platform, sampling cotton from across the Tennessee line," was the answer. "Ten wagons came to-day, and want our bid. You will find him there."

To reach the platform in question, Merlin had to go through the long double-countered store-room where dry-goods, shoes, and clothing occupied one side, and groceries and hardware the other. At the door which led to the platform there was a water-pail and goblet, and near it stood two young farmers about to drink from a pint flask of whisky. They both knew Merlin, and one of them held the bottle toward him: "Have a drink, Mr. Merlin?" he asked, smiling. "It is pretty good stuff."

"No, thank you," Merlin answered, with a sedate wave of his gold-headed cane as he passed on. He was vaguely

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offended by their suggestion that he should lower himself by drinking with them in such a manner, and yet the thought was soon gone, for there were graver matters to be faced. He had barely reached the platform when he saw Howe, a cotton-hook in one hand, a ball of fluffy cotton in the other, talking to a farmer in jeans trousers, hickory shirt and drooping felt hat. Howe was a tall, lank, middle-aged man with a short scraggly brown beard, in very plain attire. Seeing Merlin approaching, his face took on a startled expression, and he left the farmer and came forward. His opening remark seemed to emphasize rather than lessen the embarrassment that was on him, for nothing could have been more forced or irrelevant to the situation.

"D'ver see prettier cotton than that?" He displayed the sample and stood nervously pulling the fiber apart, while the color crept into his face. "We are getting a lot of this sort now from up the country."

Merlin made no answer that applied in any way to the platitude just uttered. He drew himself quite erect and avoided the merchant's timid eyes.

"I came to see you in regard to your last communication," he began, frigidly. "When my wagons returned without the ordered things, of course I was surprised at that, as well as at the tone of your note."

Howe put the sample and hook on an unopened case of dry-goods, and thrust his hands awkwardly into his coat pockets. "Well, I didn't want to hurt your feelings, but we talked it over, Wilks and I did, and we had to take a firm stand. You've got in beyond all reason, Merlin, and we are not able to carry you further, that is all. We want the account straightened out. We are being pressed on all sides ourselves. The talk of war seems to have scared our wholesale men in the East, and they are tightening in on us. We'll go by the board if men like you here at home don't pay us what you owe us. You owe

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us now over five thousand dollars; you have never gone that deep before."

"I have been expecting that venture in marble with my brother to set me on my feet," Merlin explained, weakly.

"So have I—so have me and Wilks both," said the merchant. "'Drew has sold property to an advantage several times, up North, and we hoped that he would succeed this time, though that is a big, doubtful venture, you'll admit. Month after month he has been saying it would go through, but nothing comes of it. When did you hear from him? What is his latest report?"

The planter was silent. He cleared his throat, tapped the floor with his cane, thrusting the ferrule aimlessly into a crack between the planks which was filled with grain, lint, cotton-seed, and other refuse. Presently he brought out, "He came home to-day."

"Ah, you say he did! Then—"

"It is hung up again—there is another delay," said Merlin. "Everything was in the best possible shape, but war talk came in, and—"

"Just as Wilks said it would do," broke in the merchant, coldly. "He said from the first that Yankee capital would not venture down here during this crisis, and so that is off—that's clean off?"

"I am afraid it will be delayed, anyway." Merlin was finding it difficult to be dignified before the man to whom he owed so much, and yet whose social standing was so far beneath his own.

"Now look here," Howe was gaining a sort of desperate courage in his plight. "I wish Wilks was here, but he is away, and I have to speak for both of us. We are not going to stand this any longer, Merlin. We want our money, and we are going to get it by law, if we have to. There is a way that you can get it honorably, and if you don't do it we'll take the other course, and without delay."

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"You mean—"

"That you ought to sell some of your negroes, and now while the price is fair. The South has confidence in itself at present, but a little later the conditions may change."

"But I have never done such a thing—in fact, it was never done by my father-in-law."

"Your father-in-law never got up to his eyes in debt, either," sneered the merchant, reaching out and repossessing himself of the cotton sample and hook for no particular reason than that he wanted to occupy his hands. "He would have sold anything rather than be sued as we shall have to sue you."

Merlin was pale, his mild attitude of defiance was gone. He looked at Howe appealingly. "But I don't know how to go about such a thing, unless—unless you would take some of the negroes yourself and credit my account with—"

"Impossible," pointing to a group of idle blacks on the edge of the platform, one of whom was using a pair of iron-wheeled trucks. "We are feeding those now, with their wives and children, and have very little for them to do. One by one we have had to take them by foreclosure. We have an offer for two of them now, and we will let them go. That reminds me; the agent that made us the bid is here from Florida. He is a regular, expert dealer, and is buying men to supply the orange-groves down there. He has a keen eye and knows exactly what his customers can use. Now the thing for you to do is to let me bring him out to your plantation. He needn't know that I am interested in a sale. The truth is that he asked my advice, and I mentioned you along with others as being somewhat overstocked. I told him, too, that your negroes, being mountain-bred, are unusually strong and healthy. Now what do you say? I am willing to help you out of this trouble if you will be fair and meet me half-way."

Merlin had the air of a proud man wilted by defeat.

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He hesitated for a moment, then, with a lingering breath, he asked, "When do you want to bring him out?"

"To-morrow will be the best day," Howe said, hopefully. "I am glad to see you are inclined to be reasonable about it."

"Well, let him come, and we'll see about it," said the planter. "I'll be at home all day. I don't say positively that I will sell, but I'll think it over."

"All right, all right. I may not be able to come, myself," said the merchant. "It may not be necessary, you know. It all depends on how busy I am here. Anyway, you will know how to talk to him, now that I have prepared you."

The parting was without any sort of formality. Merlin simply turned away and went back through the long store toward his waiting carriage.

CHAPTER IV

HE saw the carriage standing directly in front of the door, the horses tethered to a ring in a heavy iron weight which rested on the sidewalk. Larkin, with his back to the store, sat on an inverted flour-barrel, laughing loudly at some negro men who sat on a flat-topped, four-wheeled dray, swinging their bare feet to and fro. Merlin saw that his slave was in his favorite teasing mood, and got into the carriage without calling to him.

"Y'all is er po' bunch er triflin' town niggers, anyway," Larkin tittered. "Yo' white-trash marster done sent fer de slave-man ter rid hisse'f uv you. Ike you gwine ter be de fus' one picked out. Dat what yo' gwine ter git fer b'longin' ter er po' down-heeled, town sto'keeper. Why 'n't yer b'long ter high-up plantation quality white folks like we-all? You know what my old marster done 'fo' he died? He set his huntin'-dogs on er slave-buyer dat come on we-all's plantation ter buy some o' we-all, en Marse Merlin is ever' bit as rantankerous. When er nigger b'longs ter him, he's good fer warm clothes, en blankets on 'is bed, en plenty t'eat while he live, en er fine funeral en head-stone when he die. No wonder y'-all worm-eaten en too lazy ter stir in yo' tracks."

"G'on, nigger!" cried the driver of the dray; "yo' marster done got in his ca'iage. He'll lambast you when he git you out home."

That Larkin was unafraid of any sort of punishment was evinced by his confident guffaw as he rose and slouched slowly to his post of duty.

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"Whar you gwine ncw, marster?" he was still smiling as he stood bowing, hat in hand.

"Home," answered Merlin. "It will be sundown when we get there. Take it easy; don't be hard on the horses. What were you teasing those negroes about?"

"Dey all is scared awful," Larkin laughed, as he held open the door which he was about to shut. "In fact, ever' nigger in dis here town is scared outn his skin, 'kase er slave-man is at de hotel, en been walkin' erbout lookin' 'em over."

"I see, I see," Merlin said, thoughtfully; "and I suppose they don't want to be sold."

"Dey'd ruther die outright." Larkin laughed as if highly amused. "But dey know dey got ter tek deir medicine. Dese town folks ain't able ter hold on ter many niggers. Dey all busted up dese hard times; look lak dar ain't 'nough fer town niggers ter be put at 'cep' housework en cleanin' up 'bout de lot. La me, er big plantation lak we-all's is de place ter live."

"Drive on," Merlin said, wearily; "we must be going."

He leaned back in the carriage and folded his arms. He took out a cigar and a match, but did not smoke as he was in the habit of doing on such drives. There seemed much to think of that was too painful to be put aside. He endeavored to hope that something might arise to prevent the coming of the thing he dreaded, and yet the more he reflected over the matter the more grim became the actual situation. Yes, it must be done, and the most painful part about it was that his wife was unaware of the crisis. She must be told at once, and how would she take it? After all, whose fault was it that the estate was embarrassed as it was? He was obliged to admit that it was his own. He had made careless investments, among which the largest was the one into which his brother had led him. What excuse could he make to his wife, who

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seemed to have inherited some of her father's precaution and practical ability?

The drive was ten miles in length, and it was dusk when the plantation was reached. The house was one of the best in the county. It was a large two-story white frame building, with a wide veranda in front; a fine Colonial doorway and big, green-blinded windows. The carriage entered at a gate several hundred yards from the house and traversed a good drive of gravel to the door. As he alighted, Merlin saw his wife in a hammock at the end of the veranda, and he went up the steps and joined her, seating himself in the hammock at her side. She was a short, thin, middle-aged woman, with a sallow, splotted complexion which indicated a bad digestion. Her feet and hands were small, the latter being thin almost to emaciation.

"Well, did you see 'Drew?" she inquired, with a certain show of interest.

Merlin nodded. "Yes, he came back to-day—later than I expected, but I saw him. Is supper ready?" He was wondering if he had better delay his revelation till later in the evening, if he might not then be in a better mood for its propitiatory utterance.

"No, not quite," answered his wife. "It will be half an hour yet. Are you hungry?"

"No, no, not at all," he responded, promptly. "I think I'll run up to my room and get the dust off me."

"But you haven't told me yet whether 'Drew made that sale or not. I have been anxious about it, Tom. It is a fine thing, and the ready money would help us a lot."

"Delayed again," Thomas said. "I am disappointed, you may be sure."

"Oh, is that true?" Mrs. Merlin said, under a wave of dejection, "and all day I have been thinking of what we would do with the money, after settling for the supplies,

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of course. When—when— How long does 'Drew think we will have to wait?"

Thomas was standing in front of her now, clutching the rope of the hammock in which she still sat. "He can't tell—in fact, nobody can," was the answer from cold, ir-resolute lips. "I'll—I'll tell you all about it after supper."

He was about to turn away, but she reached out, grasped his hand, and drew him back to his seat in the hammock. "No," she cried, sharply, "I won't wait. I don't want to wait a minute. Something has happened. You are acting strangely."

His feet, resting flatly on the floor, he leaned forward, his hands clasped between his knees. He was deliberately avoiding her piercing eyes, which were fixed on his profile. He explained first, quite frankly, how he had at last lost hope of the venture with his brother, but there he paused, his fearful glance on her face, which held an almost in-credulous stare.

"Well, what else, what else?" she faltered, "for there is something else. You said all along that the marble deal was not absolutely certain—at least you did till that last encouraging letter from him. Has anything else come up?"

He found himself trying manfully to formulate as gently as possible the crowning revelation which he knew he had to make. He decided to reach it by gradual steps, and so he told her that Wilks and Howe were about to proceed against him legally.

"What, sue you—sue us?" it was significant, he thought, that she should change the pronoun in her flood of in-dignation. "Why, no one ever dared to take my father to court over anything. Did you allow them to insult you like that, and to your face?"

"Howe was very polite about it," Merlin answered. "He is in great straits for money himself. He is—he is"—the thought was in the nature of a helpful inspira-

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tion—"about to dispose of some of his slaves. Men are doing it all about, you know. They are compelled to convert them into cash. Negroes are badly needed in one part of the country and idle in another."

"No one would expect anything different from a man of that sort," was her quick retort. "Any one can see that at a glance. Sam Howe is a low, ill-bred man, you know that."

For a moment Merlin's diplomacy was checked. Presently he managed to tell her all, and sat watching her dark, resentful face in the half-light. He thought she might rail against him, but she said nothing, only putting her feet on the floor and standing up. To his further surprise, she turned without a word or backward glance and went straight into the house. Following to the door, he saw her ascending the broad walnut stairs to her room. He went up to his own, which was opposite hers, noticing that she had closed her door. Going into his room, and aided by the light of a dim, sputtering candle, he bathed his face and hands.

He heard a step in the corridor. It was Aunt Dilsey, the portly mulatto cook. She informed him that supper was ready, and he followed her to the stairs. At this moment the door of his wife's chamber was opened and his little daughter Ida came out, slid her slender hand into his, and kissed him.

She was ten years of age, quite pretty, graceful, and dainty, with blue eyes and light-brown hair. "What is the matter with mamma?" she asked, in a tone of concern.

"Matter? Why do you ask?" he inquired, anxiously.

"Because she is lying on the bed, crying, and said tell you she would not be down to supper. What ails her, papa?"

"I don't know, dear," he answered, slowly. "Perhaps she has one of her headaches. You must be a good girl and sit in her place at the table to-night. Will you?"

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"Yes," she replied. "Listen to that noise! It is George and Fred, boxing in the dining-room. Papa, they are very rough. You ought to punish them!"

Father and daughter entered the large, old-fashioned dining-room. The two boys were wrestling on the floor, pulling each other's hair and ears, punching, kicking, and making laughing threats. Seeing their father, they at once ceased and arose and began to brush their clothing.

"You ought to be ashamed," Merlin said, sharply. "This is no place for that sort of sport, and you know it."

"He tripped me as I came in," George, the elder, said, adjusting his necktie. "Father, did you hear anything in town about the Yankees making war on us?"

"Nothing of importance," Merlin answered. He was proud of the manly strength and size of his sons, and he looked at them both with affection as they stood, in obedience to his training, refraining to sit down till he and their sister were seated. He noted with approval the gentlemanly act of George, who had drawn Ida's chair out and, with his hands on its back, was waiting for her to sit down.

"I wish they would have war," he said to his father. "You would let me go, wouldn't you?"

"Don't talk about that now," Merlin made answer. "Wait till we know more about it. It may never come. The North doesn't want to fight and we won't, if they will mind their own business."

"I'm getting up a company of boys to drill, father," George went on, eagerly. "I already have fifteen names. I'm captain, and Fred is first lieutenant. They all want to be in trim. Won't you get us some guns? The boys say they are sure you will."

"I'll see about it," Merlin answered. "But you must not count on war. There are only rumors of such a possibility and they come from meddlesome agitators."

"Well, my company is going to be on the safe side," George smiled. "It will be a lot of fun, anyway. Sam

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Hicks said his father says they are going to elect you captain of a local company. Is it so, father?"

"I don't really know." Thomas stared at his son with awakening interest. "I had heard nothing of it."

"Sam said his father said you were the best man for the position in the county—that you understood tactics as well as a West-Pointer, and that the men would follow you anywhere. They would, too, father."

The compliment which had reached him so indirectly was vastly pleasing, and at another time would have put him in the best of moods, but the wordless rebuke of his wife, and the impending visit of the slave-agent which he feared would lower him in the eyes of his slaves and neighbors, loomed up before him, leaving him cold and limp in their shadow.

CHAPTER V

THE next morning Mrs. Merlin appeared at breakfast. Her husband, who had passed a bad night himself, thought that she betrayed signs of not having slept well, though she smiled as she said good morning to him and her sons and kissed Ida. After breakfast she joined him in the little library next to the parlor which he used for study, consultation with his overseer, and some magisterial duties.

"I did not act rightly last night," she said, putting her arm about his neck as he sat at his writing-table. "I ought to have said then that I do not blame you personally, for I don't. We have lived too extravagantly, Tom. We have entertained more than any one else and it has cost money, but we have not lost by it, in a way, for it has helped to make you popular and prominent. I don't want to part with any of our negroes, but if it can't be helped we must bear it. My father cared for nothing but making a fortune, while you are ambitious in other, higher things. Don't think I won't stand by you, for I will."

He was both touched and relieved, and showed it by the almost tender gaze he raised to her face. "It is good of you to say this," he faltered. "I'll get around the sale if possible, but if I can't it will be a comfort to know that you are not reproaching me."

"I can't, for I love you and am proud of you," she said, kissing him on the brow. "Let the agent come, but please don't send for me. I'll break down and spoil it all. I

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love our negroes, and I don't want to know which ones are to go, if any. Now you want to write, I see it from your pen and paper, and I am going. Good-by."

He remained in his study all that morning. He read the editorials in the papers he had from New York and Boston on the question of abolition, and tried to write the article he had planned for the *Augusta Journal* in refutation of the views held, but his ideas refused to take proper form. His anger against his brother for his radical opinions, and for his failure in their joint enterprise, still held him in its grasp. Through an open window came a cooling breeze, bringing with it the melodious singing and laughter of his slaves in the cotton-fields. That, he decided, was a point he would make in his article—the untrammelled happiness of the blacks in their present environment, a thing incomprehensible to the South's far-off and ignorant critics. Where, indeed, could a more joyous race be found? And how silly of the Northern enthusiasts to think that such helpless children of Nature could care for themselves as well as they were being cared for!

There was a timid rap on the door. It was Aunt Dilsey to say that a stranger was outside who wanted to see him. Ah, there was no use asking who it was, for he could see from her swarthy face that she suspected the object of the man's visit. News of that sort traveled swiftly among the slaves. In fact, the singing in the fields, the mellow, far-off laughter, had ceased. Merlin listened for its resumption while he waited for the agent to enter, but he heard nothing save an occasional bird-note in the trees on the lawn, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep in a distant meadow, and something nearer. "Hep! hep! hep! Get in line there, corporal! Shoulder arms! Right about face! Charge! Quick step! Take aim, steady! Fire!"

It was the voice of his son George, and a company of lads, half a dozen strong, armed with sticks tramped past his window and disappeared around the corner.

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The stranger was a plainly dressed individual of middle age, short, stocky, bald, with shrewd blue eyes and a confident, intrusive smile.

"Mr. Merlin," he began, as he shook hands, "my name is Hobson. I was coming this way, and decided to stop. Your friend, Mr. Howe, at Delbridge said he had mentioned me to you. I am on the way to some Tennessee plantations on the river. There is good business in my line in the eastern part of the State, for opinion as to the outcome of this big national question is divided pretty evenly there, and many are disposing of their slaves. The price is falling every day, and I'd advise any holder to act now if he has any idea of it, for there is no telling where the market will go to. Just now I happen to be in need of twenty or more able-bodied men, but I would not take more than two from any one plantation, so, if you have two men that strike my fancy, and we can come to terms, all right and good, if not there is no harm done Mr. Howe thinks that—"

"I know; yes, yes," Merlin said, abruptly. "He and I talked about it."

"Then," the agent said, "it will be all right for me to look over your place? I like to see them at work, you know. It is the best way to judge."

"Yes, it will be all right." Merlin had the instinctive aversion that might come to a sensitive person thrown into social contact with a hangman, and yet he braced himself to the ordeal of walking with the man. On a side-table stood a decanter containing whisky, a bowl of fresh mint, and some glasses, but, although Hobson had glanced at them several times, Merlin did not invite him to drink, a courtesy which he would have extended to any other caller. He simply said, "I'll go with you."

"Good; the sooner the better. I'm a quick trader, Mr. Merlin. I know what my customers want, and I make a cash offer and stick to it."

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They passed out at the front of the house and turned down the road toward the cotton-fields. Suddenly the planter became conscious of another feeling. It was that of actual timidity, and shame in having to meet the eyes of his faithful human property while in the company of that man in particular. In a warm flood his blood surged to his face. They knew—from end to end of the vast level fields—the plowing and hoeing men and boys knew exactly what was being enacted. They were aware that their master had never been in such company before, and that circumstance could have but one portent.

Changing conditions were forcing him to conduct they had despised in other planters and against which they had felt immune in their blind love and trust in him. How shrewdly busy they all were, as their hoes tinkled against the small stones in the mellow soil, as they bent to pull up the weeds at the roots of the young plants, or with shifting, furtive eyes guided their plow-horses along the rows! There were more than forty of them, scattered here and there, and they were all well-clad when compared with the slaves of poorer planters than Merlin had been up to the present.

The planter and his companion had got well into the midst of the workers when Hobson paused suddenly and pointed with his riding-whip at a near-by negro behind a plow.

"How old is that fellow—the tall, yellow one?" he inquired, casually.

"Twenty-five, I think," answered Merlin. "That is his father close behind him."

"I can see the resemblance; look like brothers. What do you call them?"

"The father is Rastus, the son Sambo," answered the planter. "Several generations of them have been in my wife's family." Merlin was for walking on, but Hobson lingered.

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"Ah, I see!" he said, thoughtfully. He took out a piece of paper and penciled something on it. "As I told you, I know at a glance, Mr. Merlin, exactly what my trade wants. These fellows look as if they had aristocratic white blood in them. Sometimes such fellows are hard to handle—they stir up trouble among the others. You wouldn't lose by selling them. They are the ambitious sort. I've seen them that believed down in their hearts that they were as good as any white men that ever lived. I'll bet a ginger-cake to a horse that these two can read and write."

"Yes, and several of the others, also," Merlin replied, a cold thrill passing over him, for he was especially fond of the men under discussion.

He started on, but Hobson still held back, for the two slaves were now nearer to him. Rastus was turning his horse at the end of a row of young cotton and Hobson approached him and keenly eyed him and his son from head to foot. Then he turned and fixed his eyes on Rastus.

"Let's walk back to the house," he proposed to Merlin. "I must be on my way pretty soon."

They had left the field when he said, suddenly: "I happen to be able to place those two." He was speaking with casual indifference. "I will pay three thousand for them. I couldn't do that for ordinary men. I have wealthy customers and want the healthiest, best-appearing slaves I can find."

Merlin made no reply. The price was as good as he had expected, and yet he could not drive himself to its acceptance. He shuddered and shook his head.

"I see you hesitate," smiled the agent. "Well, it is really all the same to me. The truth is planters are writing me from all sides, and I can easily fill my list. I'll tell you, Mr. Merlin. How would you like to think this offer over? I'll be back here to-morrow afternoon,

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and will give you till then to make up your mind. How will that suit you?"

"Very well, I'll give you my answer then," Merlin said, reluctantly. He would have declined outright, but the memory of Howe's ultimatum came over him, leaving him in utter despair of any other means of escape. Three thousand dollars paid on his account would, he was sure, delay the threatened suit.

When Hobson had mounted his horse and was riding away, Merlin went on the veranda and sat down. The great house behind him was very quiet. He wondered where his wife was, and what was the nature of her thoughts. He fancied that she had seen it all from her window. From behind the house came the shrill piping of a crude reed fife and the tapping of a small drum, accompanied by the voice of his elder son in a tone of command. No sound of merriment now came from the cotton-fields. The slaves were working as silently as ants before a storm, or, perhaps, had gathered to discuss the calamity that had befallen them. He could have seen them by going to the window of his room up-stairs, but he refrained from doing so. What did it matter? he asked himself. If it had to be done, that was the end of it. Other planters had been selling their slaves, why should not he do so?

CHAPTER VI

LIGHTING a cigar, he began to stride back and forth on the walk from the veranda to the gate. He had paused and was leaning on the gate, his glance on the road to Delbridge, when he noticed a pedestrian several hundred yards away. It was his brother Andrew, trudging along by the rail fence, his black alpaca coat on his arm, his shirt-collar loose, his cravat untied, his coarse shoes thickly coated with dust.

"Why didn't you ride?" Thomas asked, reprovingly.

"Because it is hard on a horse and ain't a bit on me," was the answer from the tobacco-stained lips of the chewing walker. I like to stretch my legs like this even on a hot day. I've made a lot o' short cuts through the woods, looked over the crops, and ain't one bit tired. Didn't me 'n' you walk a long ways to school when we was boys? Tom, I don't want to be different from what I was back them days. In fact, I wish I could have 'em over again. You don't, though, I know. You like a fine house like this one, dandy clothes, niggers to wait on you, and everything else on that level. I'd better not go in, looking like I do. I'll set and talk with you out here on the porch."

"Don't be silly," Thomas said, frowning. They walked to the veranda and sat down. "You must spend the night," Thomas went on, cordially, "and go back when you are fresh to-morrow. I can send you home in the carriage."

"Well, I may stay—I may *have* to, to attend to some business I have nigh here, but I'll walk when I go. Say,

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Tom, I'm bothered. I hardly slept a wink last night. I rolled and tumbled most o' the night. It was hot and close in town, anyway, and I might as well 'a' had my bed full o' fleas, for all the rest I got. But it was all in my mind. I wasn't at peace. You see, after you left I happened to meet Howe, and he told me what you was about to do. Lord! Lord! that did upset me, for if I hadn't come to you with my marble deal you never would have got in this shape."

"Never mind that," Thomas sighed. "What is done is done and can't be helped." Thomas spoke of the visit of Hobson and the cash offer he had decided to accept.

"What, them two—Rastus and Sambo? Good Lord! I know how you hate to part with them. I reckon Alice takes it hard?"

"She doesn't know of the selection yet," Thomas answered, "but she won't oppose it."

"I see, but it cuts to the quick, eh?" said Andrew, holding out his wrinkled coat and shaking the dust from its folds. "I'll bet I know how she feels. She is pine-blank like her old daddy used to be. He never sold an acre of ground or a nigger in his life. It was a principle bred in his very bones. Well, well, I'm to blame for it. That marble is a big thing, but it can't be turned into ready money right now. I wish I could buy out your half. It is Rastus and Sambo that bothers me. They are like two lovin' brothers, and have long heads on 'em full o' ideas, and hearts full o' genuine feelin's. I've talked to 'em lots in passin'. When Rastus buried his wife he took it as hard as any white man I ever saw. She was just a fat yellow wench, but I'll bet he never has thought about marryin' agin. I passed through the nigger graveyard over thar one day and noticed the fine toombstone over her grave. You didn't erect that, did you?"

"No, he and Sambo did it," answered the planter, with a shrug. "I give them all a chance to earn pocket-money,

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you know, and Rastus and his son made corn-shuck mats and sold them in town. They used to work till late in the night."

"And them's the two that rascal wants to buy. Looks funny, don't it?" Andrew remarked, sympathetically. "I'll hate to look 'em in the face after they find out that I'm at the bottom of their trouble, for they'd rather die than leave you. I wonder if the Lord ain't punishin' me fer wantin' to git rich too sudden. I didn't use to want to make money so bad, but since folks all about has been wipin' their feet on me and mine for thinkin' as I do, I've fairly itched to show 'em a roll o' cash bigger 'n they ever looked at. Le' me tell you some'n', Tommy, an' you kin put it into yore pipe an' smoke it. The hand o' the Almighty is in the sky, and its shadow is spreadin' over all these Southern States, but—but—but—"

"But what?" impatiently demanded the planter, his voice ringing sharply.

"Nothin'," answered Andrew his eyes averted to the sunlit grass beyond the steps.

"But you started to say something," Thomas insisted, irritably. "What was it?"

Andrew took out a trianguar bit of tobacco and prepared to bite into it. "I was about to tell a lie to the Lord," he said, smiling sheepishly. "On the way out here I stopped at the spring, I did, and knelt down on the cool, green moss and said my prayers. I can offer up a better petition sometimes out in the wide open than any other place, especially if thar are no clouds in sight and nature is all smilin'; and this mornin' I prayed that I would not be a party to any argument with you, whatsoever. I gave it to you purty hot under my own roof the last time, and felt bad about it, and so I vowed before the Almighty's throne this mornin' that I'd not say a single word that you'd not like, and yet when I begun just now about the Almighty's hand stretchin' out over all you blind—"

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Andrew checked himself again, and sat growing red in the face.

"I know what you mean," Thomas cried out, "and I won't put up with it."

"I reckon that one word *blind* dug too deep," Andrew said, angry himself, in spite of his vows, "but if you'll look at it fair and square, Tom, it ain't so insultin' as you might think. You see, in many cases blindness is a visitation of the Lord—that is, I mean that all you fellers ain't so awful to blame, for you have been fetched up in darkness, so to speak, while them folks up North, walkin' in the light of more advanced—"

"Stop, or leave my house!" Thomas flashed out, furiously, rising and towering over his brother. "You haven't enough brains and education to know how insulting you are. One of these days some man not related to you by blood will shoot you down on the spot, and be justified by the courts, too."

With those words Thomas wheeled and strode into the house, leaving Andrew with his unbitten tobacco in his wavering hand. Just then his sister-in-law came out hurriedly. Her face was pale and the hand she gave him was trembling.

"I heard part of your talk," she began. "I'm sorry you both can't get along better."

"It is my fault this pop," Andrew answered. "I swore up an' down on the way out here that I'd keep my mouth shut on this subject, but I failed outright. Tom invited me to stay overnight, but I reckon I'd better move on."

"That would only make it worse," Alice persisted, "and cause him to feel badly, too. You ought to be forgiving just now, for he is facing the first great trouble of his life."

"And I fetched it on 'im," Andrew confessed again. "Yes, I'll stay till to-morrow, anyway, an' try to smooth it over. The truth is, I come out here to try to help you out of your trouble if I could possibly see a way. I don't

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see no way yet, but I'm goin' to keep on tryin'. I believe in prayer, Alice, I always did, and I'm prayin' now almost while I'm talkin' to you, but when a man is prayin' fer the Lord to help him keep two half-white men from swappin' masters while down in his heart some'n' is sayin' that neither one of 'em has a moral right to—to— Now, I hope you ain't as touchy as Tom is—"

"No, no, but never mind," Alice broke in, nervously. "Let us not go into the subject. You must stay. Your room is ready for you up-stairs. If you will come I'll show you. My husband will soon be all right. He is too good-natured to be angry long."

"Well, I hope so—I certainly hope so," said Andrew, following her into the hall. "If I start in on the wrong line ag'in, Alice, I want you to stop me. I feel too mean about what I've done to Tom, already, to dispute with 'im, anyhow."

CHAPTER VII

“MERLIN’S QUARTER,” as it was called for miles around, was a cluster of cabins built out of rough, unplanned timber, and whitewashed. The roofs were made of hand-split red-oak shingles; the chimneys were pyramidal structures of logs or stone at the base, and clay-daubed sticks at the top. There were no window-panes, but each cabin had small shuttered openings to let in air and light. The group of cabins was removed about three hundred yards from the “Big House,” as the mansion was termed by the slaves and by some of the poor whites.

As a whole, the negroes are not a morbid race, and the night following the visit of the slave-agent was not a depressing one to many of the Merlin slaves. The news had been whispered about that Rastus and Sambo were to be sold, but aside from the prospective loss of these two, and the humiliating fact that their master was about to do a thing they had condemned in other planters, the matter was already beginning to fall from their minds.

Indeed, singing, banjo-playing, and clog-dancing were going on in the cabin of “Big Zeke,” an aged negro who was so badly crippled with rheumatism that he was unable to walk, and gave up the use of his cabin to pleasure-seekers that he might be entertained himself. He “picked” the banjo well, and he was doing it to-night to an audience of twenty or more. Northern sympathizers were saying much about the slaves in the South being overworked, but the fact was that those belonging to Merlin, at least,

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enjoyed life more than the average white man in any country.

Zeke's cabin was well illuminated. Crude, home-made tallow-dips in the necks of jugs and bottles stood on the mantelpiece, losing their substance by their own flames as well as from the heat of the pine-knots rising from the wide hearth beneath. Aunt Milly, Zeke's elderly wife, had prepared great quantities of metheglin and ginger-cakes, and was passing them around to the guests, many of whom sat prone on the floor or on the edge of the wide double-bed. Zeke's thick fingers twanged the strings of his instrument and thumped its drum-like head, while a boy pupil at his side rattled a pair of bones with great skill. Another boy was persuaded to dance a jig, and all clapped their hands and sang and shouted harmoniously as he swayed back and forth on his bare feet. The revelry was at its highest when a damper was thrown on it by the sudden arrival of Rastus and his son. They were given chairs near the fireplace, but both were silent and apparently downcast. Zeke's fingers for a moment lay flat on the banjo-strings. His old voice squeaked as he bent his small, bead-like eyes under their bushy brows on the elder of the two.

"Heard anything mo'?" he asked.

Rastus exchanged fleeting glances with his son before replying: "Nothin' mo', Unk Zeke, 'cep' dat de slave-man done offer three thousand in er lump fer bofe of us—he done told um dat over at Baker's farm as he was passin'. He say marster ax 'im ter wait till to-morrer evenin', en den he'd let 'im know what he will do fer sho 'bout it."

"Well, well, what yer so glum 'bout? 'Tain't done yit, nigger—dar's many slips 'twix de upper lip en de dipper."

"He gwine ter sell us off," said Rastus. "I knows it by de way he looked dis mawnin'. I know marster thoo en thoo, Unk Zeke. It like pullin' eye-teeth, but he got

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ter do it. He offer dat rapscaillion his pick, en he tuck us two soon's he laid eyes on us."

"Well, well, what's de use ter bother?" Zeke asked, insincerely. "Dat been goin' on fer all time thoo de Souf. Huh! Didn't ol' marster buy me, dat time? Maybe you will like de change. Who know? Dis ain't de onliest place in de worl'."

"I don't blame you, Rastus," Aunt Milly said, angrily, as both Rastus and his son refused to partake of the cakes and drink. "I wouldn't want ter go down in dat flat, low country. I done hear um all say dat niggers fum up de high land have ter be full er quinine to drive off sickness, en dat mos' of 'em dwindle away en die. 'Sides, maybe he wouldn't sell you bofe ter de same master, en you two couldn't stan' dat."

"Dey giner'ly do part um!" sighed Rastus. "I done hear dat often. De agent say he gwine tek us ter Florida, but who knows what he gwine ter do? Dat his business atter de papers is signed en we say good-by to y'all."

"Dat so, dat certainly is so," Milly grunted, as she waddled away with the untouched refreshment in her hands.

The group began to clap their hands and shout for music. A boy and a girl were shoved out into the floor to dance a breakdown. Rastus rose, followed by Sambo, and left the room. It was as if they wanted to speak together in private, and no one opposed them. They were silent, however, when they were alone in the moonlight.

"Whar you gwine?" the son asked, after a long pause.

"Ter yo' mammy's grave," was the low answer. "I ain't afeard er ha'nts. Des full-blood black niggers is afeard—I ain't. We got white blood in us, en de best at dat. You don't hatter come. You kin stay here en wait fer me."

"What yer gwine ter do dar?"

"Never you min', boy; mebbby some day you'll git in

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de selfsame fix I's in. Seem like I need yo' ma's company to-night, in de groun' dough she is."

They paused under a spreading beech, near a tall hedge of osage-orange bushes, above the tops of which they could see the roof and dormer-windows of the mansion. Presently a step was heard, and Andrew Merlin came from behind the hedge and approached them.

"Hello!" he said. "Is that you, boys? I was watchin' out fer you, an' thought I seed you leave Zeke's cabin just now. Why ain't you two cuttin' up didoes along with the balance?"

"You know why, Marse 'Drew," was Rastus's answer, in a low tone. "You needn't ax us. Huh! you know. I done heard you talk befo' now."

"Well, I reckon I do," Andrew admitted. "What is the use to deny it? But I've got something to say to you both, and if I don't get it off my mind I'll always be sorry. Say, boys, I don't want you to blame this on Tom, or his wife, either. I'm the skunk that ought to be paddled, as you'll find out some day, maybe. Anyway, Tom is tied hand and foot and can't act otherwise. He is sufferin' as much in losin' you as you are in goin'. I know how you feel about your wife's grave, Rastus, and that is a fine, noble streak in you."

Rastus was partly bald, and the moonlight gleamed on his smooth, yellow pate, for he wore no hat. "Nobody's any good when his heart ain't in his home and wuk," he said. "I ain't gwine ter be half er man if dey take me 'way fum here, en it de same wid Sambo. I tell you, Marse 'Drew, atter we gone suppen is gwine ter happen."

"What do you mean by that, Rastus?" Andrew asked, in startled concern; but the slave only shook his head.

"He's been talkin' like dat all day," said Sambo. "I's afeard he gwine ter lay han's on hisse'f, Marse 'Drew. He's mighty nigh 'stracted 'bout leavin' mammy's grave wid nobody ter look atter it."

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"Poor fellow, I see, I see!" sighed Andrew, and he cleared his throat. "Listen, boys, don't give up quite yet—not quite, either of you. Thar's a bare chance; it don't amount to one in twenty, but I've got one card to play, and I'm goin' to play it in the mornin'. I don't want to raise your hopes jest to drop 'em again, but thar is one other move I'm goin' to make to undo the devilment I'm guilty of. These are hard times, and folks are afraid o' their shadows whar money is concerned, but thar is one man in this neighborhood that never has failed me and I'm goin' to see him. Don't give up yet."

"You can't do nothin'," the older slave sighed. "De Lawd done turned his back plumb on us. Marster stuck to us till now, en he is done give up, too."

"We'll see, we'll see," Andrew replied, as he started away. "The Lord's back is a pretty broad thing, and I don't believe it ever was turned square ag'in' his own creatures. Try to remember that, boys."

Neither of the negroes answered as they stalked off in the moonlight. And pausing in the shadow of the hedge, the lights of the mansion playing on the dewy grass at his feet, Andrew watched them fade away in the direction of the graveyard.

"Huh!" he mused. "Some say—some fools say—that such as them hain't got souls. I'll bet Rastus has one as pure and undefiled as that moonlight. Yes, siree, and I'm lashin' it an' cuttin' it to the quick, for I'm the money-lovin' cuss that fetched all this on 'im."

CHAPTER VIII

THE next morning Andrew was up before sunrise. The family were still in bed, but he made his way out at the front door and around to the kitchen, where Aunt Dilsey was at work over a big range which protruded from the wide fireplace, its pipe in the flue of the chimney. She saw him before the open door. He was observant enough to know that she had a sort of contempt for him, caused partly by the fact that he had never allowed her to wait upon him and that he was opposed to slavery, but he didn't care.

"Say, Aunt Dilsey, I wonder if you'll do me a favor," he began. "I'm an earlier riser than these fine folks out here. I can't lie in my bed after the sun is out o' his'n, an' I've got a peart walk before me. I've got to go over to old Jimmy Webb's farm on business, an' must have an early start. All I want is a cup o' coffee—strong as I can git—an' some fried bacon an' an egg or two. If you are busy an' will just let me have a fryin'-pan an' the use o' one o' them stove-holes, an' some water in a kettle, I'll slide out o' your way in a jiffy."

She was made furious by the suggested intrusion into her domain, and it was impossible to respect a white man who would do what he proposed, and yet, incongruous as it was, he was her master's brother, and she dared not say what lay on her angry tongue.

"He'p yo'se'f," she said, pointing to a cupboard. "Dar's de aigs, in dat basket, en de coffee done parched en groun'. De smoke-house do' ain't locked, en you kin go slice off

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all de meat you want. I got ter set my table, en dus' up my dinin'-room. What you gwine ter do about some bread? It will be er full hour 'fo' I put my dough in ter bake. No biscuits is ever lef' over fum supper in dis yer house; my chillun eat um up clean."

"I'll tell you." Andrew smiled, conciliatorily—he was now by her side. "I see you have already got your dough ready. If thar is one thing in the world that I love it's flat cakes of wheat dough patted out in strips like, an' fried in hot bacon grease. If you will just cut me off a decent-sized chunk, about the size of your two fists, I'll cook me a meal that 'u'd make a hungry man's mouth water."

Dilsey sullenly complied. She knew that it was her duty to invite him to sit and eat in the dining-room, but she did not do so, leaving him alone in the kitchen while she clattered about in the dining-room, thus giving vent to her disgust at the uncouth proceedings which she felt vaguely reflected on herself. He had finished eating at the kitchen table when she returned.

"I'll wash up these things if you want me to, Aunt Dilsey," he said, glancing up at her over the edge of the coffee-cup which he was emptying of its last drop of the unsweetened, uncreamed beverage. "You may think it's strange that I'm so different in my habits to my brother Tom, but I've roughed it a lot over at my marble-quarry. I camp out thar in the mountains for weeks on a stretch, an' never keep any help."

"I'll wash um up when I do my other things," she said, sulkily. "Don't want no white man splashin' 'bout my kitchen, drappin' stuff, en messin' up. I sanded my flo' en scrubbed it clean yisterday."

'I see, I see. Well, I'm much obliged to you, Aunt Dilsey. I'll be goin'. Say, I don't want to wake anybody up to tell 'em, but you might as well let 'em know when they show up at breakfast that I won't be here to dinner.

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I'll get a bite to eat over at Webb's, but I'll be here for supper, if nothing happens."

She didn't deign to say whether she would deliver his message or not, and he turned away, his coat on his arm. "Huh!" he thought as he went toward the gate across the lawn. "She bosses Tom, I'll bet, every bit as much as he does her. I don't believe in sellin' niggers, but if I was Tom I'd be tempted to put that hussy on the block."

His journey was seven miles in length over various kinds of roads, along rugged paths through the hills, and across fields that were productive and unproductive. It was about nine o'clock when he arrived at a one-story farm-house which stood, surrounded by trees, several hundred yards from the main road. Passing through a gate, he met a young farmer who was greasing the axles of a wagon.

"Hello, Sam!" he called out as the young man recognized him. "Is your daddy about?"

"He is settin' on the porch," answered the young man. "He don't get about much here lately. He has rheumatism pretty bad."

"Well, I'll go see 'im." Andrew was moving on, but the other stopped him.

"Pa said you just got back from New York t'other day, an' I thought I'd ask you if you think we are a-goin' to have war?"

"I don't think we can any of us tell yit, Sam," Andrew answered. "It looks to me like it all depends on whether both sides can keep their tempers. I reckon you'd go in if thar was a scrimmage."

"I would jump at the chance." The young man's eyes were flashing now. "We won't have them dirty Yauks tellin' us how to run our private matters. Pa says you've been hobnobbin' with 'em so much up thar that you've got like 'em. You are a older man than I am, Mr. Merlin, but my advice to you 'u'd be to lie low right now. I know

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how these mountain men feel, an' they won't put up with that sort o' thing."

"They don't know me, an' you don't, neither, Sam." Andrew bridled slightly as the blood flowed to his face and reddened it. "I'm what I am, an' I'll not crawl at the feet of anybody that thinks different. I'll go see yore pa."

He found old Webb propped up in a rocking-chair filled with pillows, his feet bare, his hair and beard long and gray.

"Don't rise, Jimmy. I'm comin' to you," Andrew called out, as his friend made a movement as if to get up. "How is this? I didn't expect to find you propped up like a baby with the mumps."

"The spells come on me an' go off again," said Webb, pointing to a split-bottomed chair, after he had shaken hands. "Have a seat. How did you leave them rascally Yankees?"

"All right," smiled Andrew; "but let's leave them out of our talk to-day, Jimmy. You see, I know how hot you always git on that line, an' maybe I do, too. The last time we almost hitched, you remember, an' us old friends from boyhood. That won't do, will it?"

"No man's a friend o' mine that don't see, an' can't be made to see, that them folks up thar are tryin' to run over us rough-shod—trample us in the mire, but—but you are right, me 'n' you always git mad, an' I don't want to, wrong as I think you are."

"Well, I'll tell you what I come to see you about, Jimmy, an' it is a thing that, in my opinion, war or no war, will always be a solid investment. Do you remember when I drove you over my marble-quarry, an' showed you the samples that I had got sawed an' polished to ship North, that you agreed with me that it would be impossible for me not to make a go of it?"

"I remember more than that" said the old man. "I

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remember that I offered to go you halvers in it, but the last I heard was that you took your brother Tom in with you. It is reported all about now that you lost all yore money, an' Tom's, too. Is that so?"

"Folks here at home are powerful anxious to believe anything ag'in' me," Andrew smiled, "but it hain't quite as bad as that yet." He went on and explained in detail the exact status of his affairs with his Northern associates, concluding with his brother's awkward financial plight, and sat waiting for Webb to make some comment. The old man ran his gnarled fingers through his long hair and trailed them slowly down through his beard.

"Well, why did you come to tell *me* about it?" he asked, half suspiciously.

"Well, I'll tell you why, Jimmy, an' I hope it won't rile you. You always said I was a man that could look far ahead, an' sometimes I believe it is so. Well, I know you've got money banked in Delbridge. It's been lyin' thar a long time, idle, not bringin' in a cent o' toll."

"Well, what if I have? what if I have?" snarled the old man. "I'm lookin' for a safe place to put it. I want to leave some'n' to my children."

"I know that—that's nothin' but natural, Jimmy; but that ain't all. Folks will chatter about who is investin' money in a little community like this, an' it got to me some way that you have so much confidence in the outcome o' this big slave question that you are thinkin' seriously o' puttin' that money into niggers."

The blue eyes of the old man blinked under their heavy brows. "Well, I *have* confidence—I'd be ashamed not to have, born and raised here as I was. An' if you—you—"

"Stop—let's not fly off the track ag'in," Andrew broke in, with a seductive smile. "Jimmy, you ain't no fool—you kin reason, mad as you get sometimes, better than a woman in a tantrum. Didn't you ever stop to think that it is not always safe to bet on what we ourselves think

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ought to happen? Now you want the Yankees to let our niggers alone, and that is your right; but do you think that a man as old as you are ought to bank his little all on the outcome of as big a matter as that is?"

Webb locked his gnarled fingers in his lap, bent forward, stared. "You mean—you mean—" he began, but was choked by anger and stopped, unable to continue.

"I mean, Jimmy, that common horse sense ought to make you stop and think before you jump into any investment that depends on politics. Now, the slave question may go one way as well as another, but I can give you my word that I am sure—as sure as a mortal can well be of a mortal matter—that this marble-quarry o' mine is a solid thing that is good for all time. This country is bound to develop, war or no war, and it will need fine stone like mine. Now, Tom is in a bad fix and I want to get 'im out so he won't have to bear the shame o' sellin' his wife's slaves, and I've come to you to see if I can borrow five thousand dollars to buy his half. Other matters o' mine ain't doin' so well, and I hain't no collateral to offer, but if you will lend me the money at a legal rate o' interest I'll put up the entire quarry free of any claim as security. I am sure I'll effect a sale of the property some day or other, and I don't see how you could lose in the long run. It is safer than niggers, I know that, for the Lord created marble, but he didn't create slavery."

The expression on Webb's face was a grave one. "I ain't afraid o' you, 'Drew," he finally said, "but I'm this way. I don't want any profit, even interest on money, that comes out o' them rascally, nigger-lovin' Yankees. I don't want to be mixed up with such folks. I expect this country to rise and sweep over 'em like a flood. Old an' lame as I am I'll enlist. They are cowards, an' low-lived, sneakin'—"

"I'm not askin' you to deal with the Yankees—leave

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that dirty work to me," Andrew jested. "All I'm wantin' from you, Jimmy, is the loan o' money on a fine body o' Georgia land that can't possibly depreciate in value. Come what may, Southern independence all by itself, or a lastin' Union, money put in land like mine is safe, while money put in niggers depends on a few sharp politicians. If you let me have the money, I believe Tom will see the day he will regret not holdin' on with me, but that is neither here nor thar. It is killin' 'im an' breakin' his wife's heart to sell their niggers, and I'm goin' to try to help 'em. Rastus and Sambo don't want to leave, and I'm sorry for 'em—so that's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Webb said, in an altered tone, after a pause. "I'll go back to the kitchen an' tell my wife you are goin' to stay fer dinner. I'll talk over the loan with her, an' let you know. She's been ag'in' me buyin' niggers all along—says she can't stand the sight of 'em around, but I hain't the least idea what she will say about lettin' you have that much money on your marble land. You never owned niggers yourself, did you, 'Drew?"

"No, I've been ag'in' the practice, Jimmy"—Andrew smiled broadly—"but I've been forced into the next thing to it. You see, I lent Colonel Wilmot some money awhile back, just on his bare name, for he was good for any amount then, but afterward he got in a tight place, when cotton slumped and everybody closed down on him. He come to me like a man and told me he felt honor-bound to secure me in some way, and proposed that I hold a mortgage on Joe, the finest young darky he has, as security for what he owed me. I couldn't afford to lose the money outright, and so I took his offer. Folks right and left has made a lot o' fun over it, sayin' that holdin' a mortgage on a slave is every bit and grain as bad as ownin' one, but I don't think so, quite. Do you, Jimmy?"

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"The whole subject is plumb foolish." Webb rested his hands on the arms of his chair, and rose, wincing with pain. "You never would bother to mention it if you had a lot o' money tied up in 'em like your brother. Set still an' make yourself comfortable. I'll let you know what my wife says about the money."

"Gosh! it all depends on a woman!" Andrew mused as Webb left him and limped into the house. "Like as not she'll turn me down as flat as a flitter."

CHAPTER IX

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon when Andrew returned to his brother's plantation. A thing that surprised him was that the toilers in the cotton-field, which he could see from the road, were not at work, but stood about in small groups. There were many negro women and girls in sight. They seemed to have come down from the quarter and joined the men and boys, as if something unusual had happened. As Andrew approached the front gate he noticed something else. It was Rastus and Sambo, seated side by side on the steps of the veranda. Neither of them glanced at him as he entered the gate, though he walked with his usual heavy tread.

"Say, what's all this about?" Andrew inquired. "You fellers have quit work powerful early, haven't you?"

Rastus, with a low groan, raised his bald head. His eyes were bulging from swollen sockets and bloodshot. "Marse Tom sent fer us ter come, en tol' us to wait out here. Dat slave-agent is in de parlor wid 'im now. De agent done looked us over ag'in, en him en marster gone off ter sign de papers."

"How do you know that?" Andrew asked, in alarm. "I thought the feller wasn't comin' till to-night."

"He said he got thoo his business quicker 'n he expected. He said he des needed us two ter fill his list 'fo' he went back ter Florida. Whar you been all day, Marse 'Drew? You tol' me 'n' Sambo las' night dat you was gwine ter try ter he'p us out."

"That's what I've been about," answered Andrew,

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"but I haven't got time to talk to you now. I must see them two before they close a deal."

"Dey done done dat, marster," the younger slave spoke up, despondently. "Dey went in half er hour ago."

"Well, I'll see, I'll see," Andrew said, gravely. He went up the steps, and without removing his hat or putting on his coat he strode into the hall and turned into the parlor. The two men were in the little library, adjoining. Thomas sat at the table, a pen in his hand; the other stood near the window, smoking a cigar.

"I can't agree to a stipulation of that sort," the agent was saying. "You are insisting on an impossibility. How could I guarantee that they would both go to the same owner?"

At this instant the planter looked up, saw his brother, and put down his pen. He seemed to deliberate whether he would introduce the two, but finally said, "Mr. Hobson, my brother, Andrew Merlin, of Delbridge."

"Oh, how are you, sir?" Hobson said, effusively, though he was eying the new-comer from head to foot with surprise over his careless, dust-coated appearance. Indeed, Andrew formed the greatest possible contrast to his spick-and-span relative, for he was perspiring freely and only removed his slouch-hat now to fan his damp face. He put out his hand, shook that of the agent, and drew a chair up and sat down.

"I'll tell you, boys, it's hot on the road," he panted. "Will you believe it when I tell you I've walked seven miles since one o'clock? I seed a cloud in the west an' thought a shower was blowin' up, but I think it passed around us. We are needin' rain through here."

"Yes, pretty badly," frowned Hobson. "I was discussing a little business matter with your brother. Maybe you can help us out, Mr. Merlin. Your brother seems to have a pretty deep streak of sentiment in 'im. It is a noble quality, but in my business a fellow soon learns

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that he has to put all that aside. Now, your brother, while he and I have completed the details of a transfer of two of his slaves, insists on some sort of arrangement by which the two men, who are father and son, shall be kept together. You may be able to see, if he can't, that a man who makes a business of supplying customers with able-bodied men can't agree always to see that such a thing as that is carried out."

"My wife wants it," Thomas explained, feebly, with a look of dumb appeal at Andrew. "She loves those two, Rastus and Sambo, and asks that of me, for she understands how they feel about it, and is deeply concerned over it."

"It is a ridiculous idea," sneered Hobson, losing patience, "but I'm not here to tell folks what they ought to do or not to do. I've seen enough of niggers in my long dealings to know that they will work that dodge on their owners every chance they get. They pretend to care a lot for them, but they will do the same to whoever they go to next. What you ask, Mr. Merlin, is impossible, absolutely impossible, and it is not fair to me to have me come back here, as valuable as my time is, when you said nothing about that stipulation when I left. I've got the check ready, the cash is in the Delbridge bank, and I want to take a night train for Florida. What do you say? Is it a deal on my terms or not? Don't keep me waiting. I can fill my list elsewhere. Time is money to me, and I am wasting it."

The planter's face was quite pale; his hand shook as he grasped his pen and dipped it into the ink. "Well, if it can't be done, it can't," he sighed.

"Gentlemen," Andrew suddenly said, covering his knee with his hat and swinging his foot to and fro, "I don't want to bust into your talk, but I've got to go home, and I have a little important business with my brother."

"You will have to wait," Thomas sighed heavily, and

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did not look up. "He came first, and if the thing has to be done there is no use—"

"Yes, I'll wait"—Andrew stood up—"but there will be no harm in sayin', Tom, that my business is about your interest in that quarry. I've got up five thousand dollars in cash and am ready to buy out your interest for what you paid. I can wait till you fellers are through your deal, an' then we can talk ours over."

"Five thousand dollars? My interest?" Thomas gasped; his lips parted and the lower one hung quivering under tense excitement. "You can't be in earnest, 'Drew. For God's sake, don't say what you don't mean!"

"Oh, I got the money all right." 'Drew took out his bit of plug-tobacco and began to twirl it around. "Get through with Mr. Hobson, and I'll settle with you—that is, if you still want to sell to me."

"Sell? Of course I want to sell!" the planter cried, in a great breath of relief, "and that shuts off the other matter. I don't want to let the negroes go, anyway, Mr. Hobson."

"You don't want to let 'em go?" thundered the agent; "then you have had me come all the way back here out of my way to—"

"You gave me the right to accept or decline your offer to-day." Thomas's voice rang out in a tone of exultation. "We could not agree fully, anyway, and it is better as it is."

Leaving them together and slowly biting into his tobacco, Andrew stalked back to the veranda. The negroes were still on the step, and they glanced up as accused men might to read the faces of a jury returning to the courtroom after a long-delayed verdict. "It is all off 'twixt them two in thar, boys." Andrew stepped down to the ground and bent over them tenderly. "No Florida for you fellers. Your master is goin' to hold on to you. It is settled that way."

CHAPTER X

THE afternoon sun was beating fiercely down on the dusty main road just outside the village of Delbridge. Martin Dill, a poor farmer, and his wife, Amanda, were trudging along, sometimes in the shade of the trees and sometimes out in the open. The man was almost barefooted, so ragged were his coarse shoes. His shirt was of faded hickory cloth, his trousers of home-made jeans and patched in many places. He was tall and lank, had sunken cheeks and a thin beard and mustache. His wife wore a drooping, unstarched dress of blue-and-white checked gingham, a calico sunbonnet the hood of which was stiffened by invisible strips of white oak. Her shoes were new, and so heavy that with their thick coating of dust they looked as clumsy as sabots. She, too, was tall, thin, and angular, but her whole aspect was enlivened by a pair of merry blue eyes and a decided alertness of movement.

"I'm dyin' fer a drink," Martin said as they paused to rest under the branches of a beech. "Seems to me thar used to be a spring along here some'r's, but I can't quite locate it."

"It's over thar in the bulrushes—I'll bet on it," his wife returned. "Thar's bound to be water whar them things grow."

"Right you are," Dill agreed. "I kin see whar the branch runs toward the creek by that line o' young willows an' canes. Let's go to it. Merlin's well-water is hard limestone an' goes ag'in' my stomach."

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At the end of a worn footpath which led down from a farmer's cottage on the rocky hillside they found the little spring. Its brown, moss-covered bowl was formed from a hollow piece of the trunk of a sweetgum-tree sunken into the earth around the water's outlet.

"Just as I expected," Amanda cried, "thar ain't a sign of a drinkin'-goard. How are we goin' to make out?"

"Lap it up dog fashion," Martin laughed. "Git down to it—ladies fust!"

She was about to obey him when he stopped her. "Wait, Mandy. I'll show you a trick that you women can't do with your flimsy bonnets," and he knelt down over the spring, took off his slouch wool hat and turned it inside out. This done, he filled it with water and held it up to her. "How's that? I've watered my hoss that way many a time."

She drank copiously, and he followed her. Then they resumed their walk toward the village. He heard her laughing to herself, and turned on her. "What is up, now?" he asked.

"I was jest wonderin' what 'Drew will say when you tell 'im," she answered, tittering. "It is a big joke on 'im, hain't it?"

"It looks like it to me," Dill laughed. "Bein' a Union man myse'f, and ag'in' slavery, I know how he'll feel when we give 'im the colonel's message. They've poked a lots o' fun at 'im over his nigger mortgage, an' this certainly caps the stack. 'Drew ain't no more popular in town than I am out our way. Gosh! I hardly know what he will do about it! Take my word for it, the news will knock his props from under 'im. The colonel means well enough, an' is actin' right about it, as he sees it, but 'Drew won't like it one bit."

"If you look at me while you are a-tellin' 'im, I'll laugh right in his face," Amanda tittered. "He's a funny feller, anyway."

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"Well, you better hold your tongue," Dill advised, half playfully. "I've seed 'Drew git mad in an argument, an' paw up the ground like a bull in a pasture. They are runnin' 'im pretty heavy these days for havin' so many Yankee notions. If his brother Tom didn't stan' so high in the community I'll be blamed if I don't think they would ride 'Drew on a rail or give him the tar an' feathers they threatened *me* with that night."

"Well, he needs a slave, anyway," Mrs. Dill observed. "Folks say Ruth an' Anne do all the work, an' every other family in town has help of some sort or other."

Presently they reached the front gate of Merlin's home, and entered the yard, their shoes crunching on the gravel walk. No one was in sight, although the front door was open, so they went around to the rear of the house, where, on a small porch, they found Merlin seated in a stout chair which he had leaned back against the weatherboarding. He had taken off his shoes to cool his feet, and he wore no coat, the neck of his coarse shirt being open. He was fanning himself with a turkey-wing fan. There was a weekly newspaper at his feet which he had evidently been reading.

"Oh, hello, hello!" he cried when he recognized them. "By gum! I was jest dozin' off when I heard the gate click. Step up an' set down." He was now on his feet, actively reaching for chairs and placing them. "Ruth an' Anne are around some'r's. Look as if you had walked in, from your red faces."

"Thought we'd give the hoss a rest," Amanda explained as she sat down, removed her bonnet, and accepted the fan Andrew was proffering. "Martin plowed 'im hard in tough new ground till after dark yesterday."

"Oh, Ruth!" Merlin stood in the doorway and called up the stairs, "come down! Somebody's here to see us!"

He had just reseated himself when his wife appeared and shook hands with the new arrivals. "It is awfully

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warm," she said. "Anne, poor child, is suffering up-stairs from it. I would ask you both in the parlor, but I think it is cooler out here—there seems to be a draught through the hall."

Silence fell on the group after Ruth had seated herself. Dill and his wife exchanged fleeting glances. Dill stroked his sparse beard and looked very grave. "We was comin' in anyway, you know," he began, avoiding his wife's eyes, which were twinkling in suspense. "We got a few things to buy—coffee an' sugar, an' the like. We might not have dropped in on you at this time o' the day if—if we hadn't been axed to do it."

"Axed to do it?" Merlin echoed, in mild surprise.

"Yes, you know Colonel Wilnot lives right j'inin' us, an' when we started to town he overtook us at the creek an' said he hadn't time to come in town hisse'f, an' axed us if we'd deliver a message for him. You see, 'Drew, he knows me 'n' you are friends, bein' both Union, an' he didn't think, he said, that we'd mind stoppin' to see you a minute."

"Oh, I kin guess what he wants," Andrew said, glancing at his wife knowingly. "He is behind on the last quarter of interest on his note. I know what he said, Mart, as well as if you'd already told me."

"You think you do, eh?" Dill's merry eyes met those of his wife, and swiftly fell. "Well, I'll bet a live mule to a dead rat that you don't."

"Well, I can come nigh it," Merlin smiled. "He can't pay me now. He will have some money in from the sale o' cotton or wheat. Oh, I know 'im—he is a good friend o' mine, but he's hard up like the rest o' his sort."

"I reckon you'd be glad if that *was* what he had to say, 'Drew," Dill said, gently, the flare of amusement dying out of his serious eyes. "Say, 'Drew, the colonel is in a worse plight than you think, an' that's one thing he axed me to say. Would you believe it, his creditors, big an'

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little, on all sides, have deviled 'im an' pressed 'im till he is nigh crazy. He is done give up his land an' everything he owned, an' is going out West to his youngest married daughter, who writ 'im she would give 'im an' her mother a home the rest o' their days. The colonel was so upset that me 'n' Mandy both thought he was goin' to bust out cryin'."

"Yes, he did look awful," Mrs. Dill joined in. "He is gettin' old and childish, an' he was worried about his debt to you more 'n all the rest, 'Drew, for he said you had never said a hard word, or even pushed your claim, while all the rest was at his heels night an' day, an' that was why he said he was goin' to see that your debt was—was fixed—fixed someway. Mart, you tell 'im 'bout it."

"I was comin' to it," Dill said, taking a deep breath. "'Drew, he said he wanted us to tell you that he knowed you'd hear the news of his break-up, an' he wanted you to get the straight of it."

"Straight of it?" Andrew frowned. "I don't see any straight of it, as far as I'm concerned. Looks to me like I'm as deep in the mud as he is in the mire."

"The colonel don't think so," said Dill. "In fact, from the way he talked to me an' Mandy, you are in luck. He says the slave Joe will fetch somewheres nigh his debt to you, so, as he is in a hurry to get away, he said for us to tell you that as soon as he got through packin' up the things he is to take West he is goin' to fetch Joe in to you an' consider the debt paid."

"Fetch 'im in to me?" Andrew blurted out. "What do you mean by that?"

Mrs. Dill, for reasons of her own, had put on her sun-bonnet, and she now drew the hood of it down quite over her eyes, and sat with a certain quiver to her thin shoulders which the roving glance of her husband observed and which seemed to affect his risibility.

"Yes, 'Drew, the colonel said that the nigger would

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fetch a fine price if you would just hold on to 'im till you struck the right man to sell to, an' that it eased his conscience to know that sooner or later you'd get most o' the loan back, if not the interest. He said he'd sell Joe hisse'f an' pay you, but that his agreement called for you gittin' 'im in case the debt wasn't paid."

Silence fell on the little party on the porch, save for a suspicious sound from the sunbonnet, which may or may not have been due to the blowing of her nose by the farmer's wife, who held a handkerchief to her face.

"You don't mean to say that Wilmot is goin' to dump that nigger on me, do you?" Merlin asked, staring first at his visitors and then at his wife.

"That's the size of it," Dill replied. "He said he'd fetch 'im in to-morrow when he comes to take the train. 'Drew, you'll have to use common sense in this case, even if you are ag'in' slaveholdin'. You've got good money tied up in this thing, an' you can't afford to lose it, havin' a family dependent on you."

"No, thar hain't but one thing to do," the aperture of the sunbonnet was now turned toward Mrs. Merlin as the tentative voice emerged from it. "You need help about the place, Ruth, an' now is your chance. I think you are lucky, myself. 'Drew has spouted a lot ag'in' slaveholdin', but nobody would blame 'im for gettin' his money tied up this way. As I understand it, Colonel Wilmot forced it on 'im."

"Yes, you'll wiggle out of it someway, 'Drew," Dill said, consolingly. "Joe is a valuable young mulatto, an' if you don't want to keep 'im you kin sell 'im, or do the—the other thing."

"The *other thing*?" Andrew repeated, waxing angry, so angry, indeed, that to busy himself he began to put on his shoes.

"Why, yes! Things may ease up with you in money matters after a while, 'Drew, an' you could set 'im free.

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Though if I was in your place I'd think twice before takin' such a step. Your brother Tom an' his set would never overlook it. They would take it as an insult to them, an' hate you like a snake, if they didn't actually make it too hot for you to reside amongst 'em."

Merlin was pale and quivering. He started to say something, but stopped. There was general silence for a moment. Mrs. Dill broke it, her eyes fixed steadily on the startled face of Mrs. Merlin.

"You won't let 'im act foolish about it, will you, Ruth?" she asked, with the probing tool of a woman's curiosity, which in this case had no little natural envy in it. "You-all need a man like Joe about. Look at the bunch the Prestons have right next door."

"I'll leave it all to 'Drew," Mrs. Merlin said, with some animation.

Here Andrew was heard from. "I'll attend to it as I see fit," he said, fiercely staring around at them. "I didn't get into this mess intentionally, an' I will do the best I can."

"I know you kin manage it, 'Drew," Dill said, in a mollifying tone. "Folks will have to git up early in the mornin' to git the best o' you in any matter. I don't know what action you'll take—if any—but what you do will be plumb right. For the present you will be obliged to hold on to the nigger. The colonel will drop 'im on you to-morrow, an' leave you to git your money the best you kin."

Merlin said nothing to this, but it was plain that he was still angry.

"The oddest thing about it is the way Joe acts hisse'f," said Mrs. Dill, removing her bonnet and folding it in her lap, "that is, if report out our way is true. We come by Gibbs's store at the cross-roads, an' stopped to rest an' eat our little snack o' bread an' meat. Thar was a crowd o' farmers hangin' around, an' the last one had heard about Joe's transfer to you-uns."

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"You said the nigger acted odd," ventured Mrs. Merlin. "What did you mean?"

Mrs. Dill seemed slightly taken aback by the pointed question. She smiled, but not with merriment, and looked at her husband.

"You reckon I'd better tell 'em what they said?" she inquired.

"Why not? You started it," Dill answered, dryly. "You might as well. If Ruth is like you she'll dig it out of you, anyway. A woman loves bad news better 'n none at all."

"Well, Ruth, you know," Mrs. Dill pursued, with reviving amusement, "folks like them out thar hain't got no love for 'Drew, or any other Union man, for that matter, an' they may be expected to poke fun over a thing o' this sort. They say—they actually say that Joe is so mad that he is sulkin' about, threatenin' to kill hisse'f."

"To kill hisse'f!" burst from 'Drew, lifting his flashing eyes from the shoe he was awkwardly tying.

"Yes. You see, he is a nigger; an' a nigger will be a nigger no matter what happens to 'im. Folks up North, I reckon, think a feller half white would rather belong to a man in favor of freedom than one that ain't, but it ain't so with this one. You see, Joe is what you might call a stuck-up, quality dorky. Of all the old Wilmot slaves he is the proudest an' the most uppity. He's a great dresser, a ginger-cake colored dandy, a leader in singin', an' a big speaker in meetin'. His chief brag has been that none o' his blood ever belonged to any but rich folks. You mustn't get mad about it, but them folks at the store said Joe was goin' to mash up a bottle an' swallow the powdered glass in a lump o' meat rather than belong to a man that never owned slaves an' was in favor of equality. So, Ruth, I predict that you will have trouble with Joe. Folks seem to think that he won't do nothin' rash till Colonel Wilmot's gone, anyway. That is one fine point

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about the nigger. He is tryin' to make his master think he is satisfied, while his heart is actually broke."

"I'll break his *back* if—if he insults me or mine," Andrew flared up against his will. "If he comes to me talking about powdered glass, after all I've said and done for his race, I'll—I'll—" Merlin choked up and did not finish.

"Oh, it will work itse'f out all right in time!" Dill remarked, as if regretting his wife's rather too plain speech. "Lots o' folks talk about killin' theirse'ves that never find time for it. I never yit heard of a nigger doin' it, an' it won't be so in this case. Most o' the stuff we heard at the store was made up, anyway. Now, take my advice; let 'im come on; put 'im to work; feed 'im aplenty, an' let 'im run about purty free here in town with his sort, an' he will soon think he has bettered hisse'f by the change. He will be the cock o' the walk with his dandy ways, an' strut amongst these town niggers. I'll be curious to look at 'im a month from now."

"I'll do as I think best about it," Merlin fumed. "I've got work for 'im to do; idleness ain't good fer him nor no other man. That's what is the matter with 'im now. Wilmot spoiled him bad. The scamp turned up his nose an' snorted at me the day Wilmot made out the mortgage in the law-office at the Square an' tol' 'im what he'd done. As far as I've ever heard, he never had anything to do except shave the colonel, make mint-juleps for company, stand in the front hall like a hat-rack, or set on a high seat in a beaver hat an' drive the carriage. I won't have any o' that tomfoolery fer him to go at. I've got a piece o' hillside land to clear up, an' I'll buy 'im a sharp ax, an' if he don't know how to cut down trees an' pile up cord-wood I'll show 'im. I'm full-blood white, an' I had that sort o' work to do when I was a boy, an' he ain't no better if the whole of Yankeedom is worked up over his sort."

"That's the talk!" Dill said, clapping his hands. "You

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are a abolitionist o' the right brand, 'Drew. Free all in a lump or none—treat 'em all alike. If you could afford to lose the money an' set that struttin' darky free it might play havoc with hundreds around 'im. You can't do it, 'Drew, even if they all do poke fun at you fer takin' back-water when the shoe got on yore own foot. But they will laugh loud an' hearty at first—you may count on that."

Mrs. Dill, being a normal woman, wanted further information from her own sex, and she turned to Mrs. Merlin. "Whar are you goin' to put 'im when he comes?" looking about the yard. "You don't seem to have no nigger-shack that I'm able to see."

"I was just thinkin' about that," Mrs. Merlin answered. "There ain't no place in the yard except the smoke-house, or—or—do you see the little house at the end of the kitchen? We used to cook in it, but quit because the victuals got cold toting it so far, and it was awful sloppy in rainy weather."

"Is it open? Let's take a peep at it," suggested the eager investigator.

"All right, but I'll show you the lumber-room up-stairs first, and see what you think about that."

They turned into the dining-room from the porch and went up a narrow, dark flight of stairs to a large room. "Here's where 'Drew sleeps," Mrs. Merlin explained, "and this is the lumber-room," opening the door of a smaller chamber at the end of the house. "We have no use for this at all. What do you think about putting him in here?"

Mrs. Dill drew her brows together quite critically for one of her station, and slowly shook her head. "I say it won't begin to do, Ruth, because quality folks that I know, at least," she emphasized the pronoun and became more emphatic as she continued to shake her head—"quality folks that I know wouldn't think of it for a

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second. Why, he'd have to pass through his master's room every time he went to bed, or got up before day to feed the stock or make the fires. You might have a ladder," Amanda tittered out, impulsively, "for 'im to climb up from the outside to the window, but that would look funny. The Preston darkies would catch 'im at it an' circulate all manner o' tales about 'im fallin' off an' the like. No, let's give this room up an' go look at that old kitchen."

"I was doubtful about this room, anyway," Mrs. Merlin said, in deference to her glib guest's verdict, as she led the way back down the stairs and out to the little house in the yard. She pushed the unlocked door open, and displayed a desolate interior lighted by a tiny window hung with cobwebs and a floor bestrewn with old garden-tools and pieces of discarded furniture.

"Just the place—couldn't be better," Mrs. Dill declared. "It is as tight as a can o' cove oysters, an' got a good-enough fireplace. I'll bound you he didn't have a better berth at Wilmot's. The town darkies may laugh at 'im for bunkin' in a' old kitchen, but that can't be avoided. It is the best you can offer, Ruth, an' when you consider that his race used to live in caves in jungles, without a rag to hide their nakedness, it is a rise instead of a come-down."

CHAPTER XI

THE Dills left in a wagon which a neighbor brought to take them home in. The afternoon passed and dusk fell. Anne had heard all about the approaching event from her excited mother, and was waiting to tell her brother about it. She was standing at the front gate, and had called several times to Robert, who was playing ball with some boys at the end of the street.

He came along the sidewalk flushed and warm, a ball in one hand, a bat in the other.

"I'd think you'd get enough of that game while it was light, without waiting till after dark," she said. "Bob, you can't guess what has happened."

He didn't seem very curious to know what she had to say, but when she had told him he whistled in surprise. "I'm glad of it," he said, "downright glad."

"Glad? Why?" Anne asked.

"Because everybody else has niggers here in town," he answered, "and because—"

"Because what?" she asked.

"Oh, you know," he said, slamming the gate after him and tossing his ball and bat against a clump of rose-bushes. "You know what they all have been saying about the old man and slavery. I'm sick and tired of it. I've lost several friends over it. I want to be like the rest around here, or move away. Why can't the old man be like Uncle Tom? Folks don't make fun o' him, and say he wants slaves to marry white folks and all that stuff."

"They tell lies about father," Anne burst out, indig-

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nantly. "They invent a fresh one every day. They don't know what he thinks, and you are losing respect for him—calling him 'the old man.' You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I don't care what these folks think. Father is right in all he believes and says."

"You think so, eh?" Robert sneered. "Well, let me tell you something, girl. If I was a man with a family in a place like this I'd not say things to make my wife and children despised and shunned. I have a right to my friends the same as he has to his. He makes friends in the North, and keeps us from having any down here."

"You ought to be ashamed—ashamed—ashamed!" Anne shouted the words after him as he clattered up the steps of the veranda. "Father is brave enough to stand to his convictions, and you are not; that's all. You will see the day, if you ever have sense enough, to admire him and be proud of him."

Supper passed in silence. Andrew had nothing to say about the coming of the slave, and Robert, who stood somewhat in awe of his father, did not broach the subject, and, being fatigued from play, retired early to bed. Anne and her mother sat on the front veranda. It was a warm, cloudless night and the heavens were bespangled with stars. Over the dewy grass of the lawn thousands of fireflies were darting and flashing their tiny lamps. Presently Merlin came around the house, paused for a moment at the steps, and then turned to the gate, where, with his arms on its top, he stood staring toward the Square.

"He didn't like Mandy Dill's meddlesome talk," Mrs. Merlin said, in a voice not intended for her husband's ears. "She don't mean no harm, but she's the sort of a woman that is always tittering on the sly. A body is apt to remember what she's said after she is gone. She is a good friend, but is jealous of us and can't hide it."

Anne made no reply to her mother's tentative remark.

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Her eyes were on her father, and she suddenly called out, "Father, you forgot to wind the clock."

"I know it," Merlin answered, wearily, half turning toward her. "Please do it for me. That's a good girl."

As she was winding the old-fashioned mahogany time-piece on the mantel in the sitting-room, her mother passed. "I'm going to bed," she said. "I'll have to be up early to fix Joe's room. I'm too tired to do it to-night. Are you going to sit up?"

"I'll wait for father," Anne returned. "He is usually in bed before this. He is terribly bothered. I've never seen him like this before."

"And there is nothing to bother about," Mrs. Merlin answered. "He is making a mountain out of a molehill. I'm glad Joe's coming, myself."

Anne heard her mother slowly ascend the front stairs, and her creaking tread on the floor of the room overhead. Then she went back to the veranda. Her father was still at the gate. He had not changed his position. Anne sat on the balustrade for several minutes, hesitating, and then, drawing a light knitted shawl over her shoulders, she went to him.

"Father, you are later than usual," she ventured, gently.

"I know that," he muttered, without looking at her, and then was silent.

She leaned on the gate beside him. His massive, hair-coated hand was near her and she stroked it with the gentle sympathy of a little child. "Father, you are worried about this thing," she said. "It has upset you more than anything for a long time."

He seemed touched by her caress and insistent words. He put his rough hand on her head and rather clumsily stroked her soft hair back from her brow.

"Child, child, you can't understand," he faltered. "This is a strange, unfeelin' world. I want to believe thar is a God to look to for help—one that *will* help—but some-

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times I'm actually afraid thar hain't, for often when I'm tryin' my level best to do the right thing, according to my poor, dim lights, thar hain't nothin' around but solid, unfeelin' darkness. It's that way to-night. I've lost mighty nigh all the little savings I was laying aside for you all, and am in debt besides. I did think the money that Wilnot owed me would be paid some day or other, and that was a comfort. To secure it, when it was slipping from me, I had to take that mortgage. Somehow it was ag'in' my highest ideas of right conduct, considerin' my views, but my love for my family overrid it, an' I put up with the gibes an' jokes on all sides, but now it has come to this. In spite of all that I've contended in regard to abolition bein' right in God's sight, to-night I'm a slaveholder myself. Young as you are, thar is a sight more in it than you can grasp. You see, your ma has some rights—marryin' me as she did when she might 'a' done a lot better—an' I can see that she's glad this slave is coming. Poor woman! she's like a child deprived of playthings when other children all about are overstocked with 'em. She wants to keep this slave an' be on some sort o' par with her neighbors, an' I wonder what my moral rights really are in the sight o' high Heaven. I could set Joe free—the law would let me do that—but it would raise a howl an' a storm for a man as poor as I am to do it. Besides—now, it may be the devil whisperin' it to me, for all I know—but the truth is that a feller like this one hain't no more fit to be turned loose on his own responsibility than a three-year-old child. He couldn't look after himself. He don't want to be free, nohow. All he wants is to belong to some rich aristocrat, and that couldn't be arranged unless I'd sell 'im, an' I won't barter in human flesh if it kills me."

"Father, you once told me"—Anne was now holding his hand against her breast—"that certain things I have said to you at times when you were troubled have been a help."

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"They have been," he responded, tremulously, almost hopefully. "More than once, young as you are, you have made me see straight when I didn't know which way to turn."

"Well, you don't know which way to turn to-night," Anne said, "and so I'm going to tell you exactly what I would do if I were in your place."

"Well, what would you do? I'm listenin'," Merlin said. "Go ahead, I'm listenin'."

"I'd take Joe, father, and I'd give him a good home, and treat him so well that he'd learn to respect me. I'd do that for the present, anyway, no matter what meddlesome people said. You say it wouldn't be wise to free him now, so why think of it? Mother and brother want him to come, and I am sure if you will do as I say it will all end as it should."

"Thar don't really seem any other way out of it," Merlin said, with a great gulp of rising emotion. "Child, child, you are a blessing to me; you have been that since you got old enough to prattle. I never have told you before—thar are things that seem so pretty an' holy that a rough feller like me gits ashamed to speak of 'em, but I'm goin' to mention one to-night that I've thought of many and many a day. Do you know I read in a book once that as a general thing boys was like their mothers, an' girls like their fathers. That made a big impression on me, for it always seemed to me that Tom was like his ma and that you had my way o' thinking in every single thing. I'm tellin' you this now as bashful as a boy talkin' to his sweetheart, but I'm glad I kin do it, fer I owe you more than I owe any other livin' person, yore ma not excepted. Somehow, as smooth as our early married days was, me an' her seem to be driftin' wider apart now. Things that are God's eternal truth to me are plumb foolish to her. I don't blame her, you understand, for the Lord fashioned her as she is an' me as I am, but I

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git lonely sometimes an' want somebody to agree with me about what seems so important to the world's progress. That's why you are such a sweet comfort."

He put his arm around her and led her back to the steps. "Now let's both go to bed," he proposed, cheerfully. "You've taken a heavy load off my mind. I wanted some'n' to turn me positive one way or the other. I'll be the butt of all jokers in this town to-morrow, but I kin stand it."

CHAPTER XII

THE next morning about ten o'clock Colonel Wilmot, a slender, elderly gentleman, with iron-gray hair and beard, arrived at the gate in a spring-wagon which contained several trunks. In a chair beside him sat the slave about whom so much had been said. Robert and Anne were on the veranda with their mother, but no one of the three went to the gate when Merlin slowly descended to meet the arrivals.

"I decided to bring Joe over myself," Wilmot began, with a regretful smile of greeting, as he shook hands with his former creditor. "He is not in the best of moods, owing to our breaking up so sudden. He has been with me so long that he hates to see me leave. But I've been talking to him on the way over, and he seems a little bit more reconciled. I'm sorry that I was unable to hand the cash over to you instead of him, 'Drew, for you have acted fair and honorably with me all along. But you will get your money out of Joe sooner or later. If I didn't feel sure of that, Merlin, I'd feel ashamed to look you in the face, for when you lent me money on my bare name you showed that you trusted me in full and believed that I'd act honorably.

'Now, Joe," turning to the slave, a fine-looking, tall, yellow man who was dressed remarkably well, "jump out and take your trunk in. Somebody will show you where to put it."

"My wife will show 'im," Merlin said. "Ruth, tell 'im where to go."

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Sullenly, and with lowering brows, the slave got out of the wagon and drew his trunk, a small, hair-covered affair, over its edge and slowly eased it down to the ground.

"Wait a minute, Joe," Colonel Wilnot said, a sad, careworn expression in his blue eyes. "I may never see you again, my boy—it is a long way to where I'm going, and I am not apt to come back. My days are numbered, and I'm tired out. I don't like long trips on the cars. This one may make me sick. I don't know." He reached out and took the negro's hand, and as he pressed it he went on: "Be a good boy, Joe. As God is my final judge, I hate this step more than anything else in the world. If I could possibly give you a home out West, and could afford to own you, I'd take you with me, but that is out of the question now. Your duty is here, and I hope you will act right by your new master in every way. He is a good, honorable, plain man. He differs from me, and many others here in the South, but that can't be helped."

The thick lips of the mulatto relaxed and fell to quivering. "Good-by, marster," he faltered. He started to withdraw his hand, but Wilnot held on to it.

"No hard feelings or ill-will, Joe?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, suh, marster," the slave gulped. "I hain't got no hard feelin's ag'in' you. I knows you is doin' all you kin, suh, en wouldn't leave me in dis fix ef you could he'p it."

"Well, then, good-by, Joe."

"Good-by, marster," the slave lowered his head, a quivering hand on the end of his trunk.

The colonel had taken out a cigar. He lighted it and then shook hands with Merlin and raised his hat gallantly to Anne and her mother on the veranda. "Good-by to all, and best of luck," he called out as he took up the reins and shook them over the backs of the horses. And as the wagon rumbled off down the street a wisp of blue smoke trailed after the ex-planter, like a banner of defeat

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unfurled to the breeze. For several minutes after the wagon had turned the street corner Joe stood beside his trunk, his dull eyes on the ground. Merlin hesitated, looked toward Anne and her mother, and then turned on the slave.

"What ails you?" he asked, rather sharply.

"Nothin', mars—" The mulatto seemed to bite into the word as it rose to his tongue, then he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and looked down again.

Mrs. Merlin was now at the gate, her face full of anxious concern, born of inexperience in dealing with slaves.

"Bring your trunk in, Joe," she said, "and I'll show you where to put it."

There was no mistaking the sniff and sneer on the part of the slave, who made no visible movement.

Andrew and his wife exchanged troubled glances. There was a pause. It was plain that neither of them knew what was best to do in the matter, and the worst part of it was that the negro had intuitively sensed their helplessness and was bent on taking advantage of it.

"Have you had anything to eat since you left the plantation?" Andrew bethought himself to ask.

The slave shook his head. "I hain't tetched er bite since marster tole me he done swap me off ter you. Dey-all done fetched stuff ter me—chicken, ham, pie, en coffee, but I wouldn't take it."

Once more the glances of man and wife traveled back and forth, finally centering, in a desperate sort of lurch, on the swarthy face so full of sinister defiance. "I reckon," observed Merlin, at first with a touch of sympathy, and then with growing indignation as he continued—"I reckon you are kinder disgusted. I know how you feel, I'll bet: Most o' your sort has a way o' thinkin' you are some better 'n just common, ordinary white folks that never owned slaves, and right now the truth is you can't abide the idea o' belongin' to us. You had as well own up to

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it, Joe, for I can see through you, thick as your hide is. Now you and me ought to come to some sort of agreement that we can both live under in harmony. You won't find me or my family of the overbearin' sort. We was forced to take you, and we are ready and willin' to do what is fair by you. You've been livin' amongst high-falutin folks like Wilmot, an' you hain't never tried our sort. Give us a trial before you set us down as heathens plumb below your high an' mighty notice. We won't put you to work fer a few days—we'll give you a chance to rest up an' look about an' git acquainted. Thar's a bunch o' darkies right over that fence thar—the Preston lay-out. You will have plenty o' company. Now tote your trunk back behind the house an' put it whar you're told. My wife will fry you a couple o' eggs and some bacon an' make you some good coffee. If you hain't had no grub to-day you need it."

But all that Merlin had managed to say with such fluent clearness to himself seemed to have gone into one of the negro's ears and to have met with not the slightest obstruction on its way out at the other.

"I don't feel like eatin' a bite," he muttered.

"Oh, you don't!" cried Merlin, at the end of his resources. "Maybe you'd feel different about it if you'd set in the kitchen door an' smell the stuff a-fryin'."

"I don't want ter eat," reiterated the slave, "en what's mo', I ain't gwine ter. I'm thoo wid it all—plumb thoo! I didn't tell marster, 'kase I didn't want ter worry 'im, dis las' day, but I'm thoo!"

At this moment Anne, who had heard the entire conversation, came to them. She stood very erect before the negro, her calm eyes bearing down on him with firm dignity. "Why are you waiting here?" she asked, sharply. "Take your trunk to the old kitchen back of the house and put it in."

For an instant the negro stared straight at her; then

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his eyes fell. "All right, young miss," he said, and, lifting the trunk, he put it on his shoulder and carried it through the gate and around the house.

"That is the only way to talk to him," Mrs. Merlin spoke up, approvingly. "If you give 'em an inch they will run clean over you! 'Drew, you will have to be firmer than you are. Just now you was arguing with him as if he was the Governor of the State and you was looking to him for a favor. No wonder he gave you so much back-talk."

"You are every bit as green at the business as I am." Merlin smiled broadly. "You go back an' see if he has found the right place, an' feed 'im some'n'. I'll bound you he'll go to it if it's laid before him."

CHAPTER XIII

A WEEK passed. The new slave spent the time in absolute idleness, for the Merlins had found nothing for him to do. Joe had gone to a party one night given by the Preston negroes, but had returned early, highly incensed by the reception he had received. Anne was sitting up, reading, when she heard quite a tumult beyond the fence which separated her father's property from that of Mr. Carter Preston, next door. She heard Joe shouting back at the negroes in a weakly tone of defiance as he stood in the door of his new home. "You all black fools!" he cried out. "You 'ain't got no sense!"

"One-nigger Joe! One-nigger Joe!" was the taunting and enigmatical epithet which young and old were hurling after him. "Sleep in yo' ole kitchen lak er cockroach in er crack—One-nigger Joe! One-nigger Joe! Feed 'im wid er spoon—put er napkin 'roun' his neck—po' One-nigger Joe!"

The house was very still, for the rest of the family were asleep, and not awakened by the tumult. Anne put down her book and went out on the back porch. The moon was shining brightly and she saw Joe standing disconsolately at the door of his little house.

"What's all this about, Joe?" she inquired. "They are waking up the entire neighborhood."

"Dey all fools!" Joe muttered. "Dey hain't got de sense dey born wid. Dey always pickin' at me lak flies on er dead hoss. I'm gwine ter bust deir heads some day. Listen ter dat—des listen!"

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It was an improvised song the negroes were singing to a tune of their own:

"One-nigger Joe! One-nigger Joe!
Who's bin here since I bin gone?
One-nigger Joe! One-nigger Joe!
Po' black nigger, all erlone—
Sleep wid de cat en gnaw er bone."

"Go to bed, Joe," Anne said, warm with indignation. "Don't call back to them. I'll speak to Mr. Preston about this to-morrow. They sha'n't tease you like this any more. Now go to bed. It sha'n't happen again."

The next morning Anne discovered that her mother and father, being sound sleepers, had not heard the disturbance, and she did not mention it to them. After breakfast, however, she went to the little gate which opened into the Preston property. She was about to enter when Arthur Preston, a handsome, tall young man of twenty, who was at the barn waiting for a servant to bring out his horse, saw her and, doffing his hat, he came toward her.

"Were you on the way over?" he asked, flushing as if pleased at the sight of her.

"Yes; I wanted to see your father," Anne answered, with dignity. "Is he at home?"

"Why, no, he's out at the plantation!" Arthur answered in surprise. "Is it anything I can attend to?"

Anne hesitated, then she plunged: "I want to see if he has any sort of control over his negroes. Did you hear that racket last night?"

"Oh, you mean—? I see. Yes, it was terrible, wasn't it? I'm sorry, Anne, if they disturbed you all. They didn't bother me much. The truth is, I love to hear them—in fact, I envy them. They certainly get a lot out of life."

"I'm not talking about what you are," Anne retorted,

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sharply. "I want to see if you or your father will have the decency to keep them from insulting my father and mother, and, in fact, all of us."

"Why, Anne, you surprise me!" Arthur exclaimed. "This is news to me. Why, really I don't understand. You ought to know that I—that I—that my father would not allow our negroes to insult any of your family. You know how I respect you. I've shown that. I've proven it. Please tell me what you mean."

Anne calmly raised her eyes and stared straight into his face. "Did you hear what they called Joe last night?" she asked.

"I declare I did not notice, Anne," he answered, in deep concern. "In fact, they are so much like children that I never pay much attention to them."

"I know you don't—that's the trouble!" Anne flashed out. "But if you were to hear them continually yelling over the fence, 'One-nigger Joe!' what would you, with your superior intelligence, think they meant by it?"

"'One-nigger Joe'?" the young man repeated, as if mystified. "Why, really, Anne, I don't quite see—Oh!" and an impulsive smile broke over his genial face. "Now I understand."

"Well, what did they mean by it?" Anne persisted, coldly, her lips drawn tight, her eyes flashing.

"Why," he hesitated, "they must have meant—I suppose they meant that—that your father happened to own only *one* negro; but you oughtn't to let that bother you, Anne. You must consider the source."

"I *shall* consider the source, and I'll regard *you* and your family as the source, if you don't stop them from saying such things to our negro. It is bad enough to have men like your father, and women like your sister and mother, constantly insulting my people, without your slaves yelling things like that over the fence at midnight."

Young Preston was quite disturbed. He looked very

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grave as he bent toward her. "Anne," he faltered, "I've seen the way this great national matter has been drifting for some time, and deplored it, but I really did not think that you and I would ever get mixed up in it."

"We are *already* mixed up in it!" she hurled at him, tossing her head proudly. "You think your parents are right, and I *know* that my father is. We heard what your father said in the Square about our taking this slave, and all about how your mother and sister giggled over it. No wonder your negroes are insulting us, for their owners are setting the example."

"Listen to me, Anne," Arthur pleaded. "Let's drop all this and remain friends. You and I can't fight this thing out. It is too big and far-reaching. Let's let the others bite and scratch all they want. I was just thinking what a sweet thing our long friendship has been. Why, ever since you and Mary used to play with your doll-things in the barn you and I have been—"

"I don't want to talk about friendship for you or any one else," she stabbed him, coldly. "I want you to see that your negroes do not repeat those insults again."

"Very well," he agreed, slowly; "but it is like this, Anne, and I am sure you know negroes well enough to see it—the truth is that the more you try to keep them from that sort of thing, the more they will keep it up. If I stop them from using the particular expression which offended you they will only get up something else."

"They will throw stones at my father next, I suppose," Anne said, white with anger. "I see that we are helpless against your whole family—you and your slaves along with the rest."

She was turning away, and, still holding his hat in his hand, he followed her several paces without speaking. Suddenly he said: "Wait a moment, Anne; don't leave me like this. I promise to do everything I can to stop the negroes from teasing Joe. If I fail it won't be my fault."

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"Well, it has to stop," Anne cried. "I won't live next door to people who will permit it. The entire community is against my father for having lofty principles which he is too big and brave to hide. And you will see that he is right before it is over with. If it comes to war, the North will sweep over this country like a great river out of its banks."

"Don't talk silliness, Anne." It was the first exhibition of his temper. "You are too sensible to think that, girl though you are."

"Well, I *do* think it!" she flashed at him. "I think it because my father thinks so. He has far more sense in such matters than he gets credit for, and has had the opportunity to study the situation. He is right, and you all will find it out to your cost. He says you are bent on ruining this country, and he is right. You'd help to do it yourself, Arthur Preston. You are just hot-headed enough."

"If you mean that I'd go to war you are quite right, Anne," he said, gently. "I'd shed every drop of blood I have in that cause, and be glad to do it. You have been listening to your father, who has come home full of Yankee ideas, but he is mistaken—awfully mistaken. Men in the North don't want to fight for this thing. It is nothing to them, but to us down here—well, it is our life's blood, our very blood, our right as free-born Americans."

"I won't talk to you any longer," Anne said, coldly, her lip curling and quivering with passion. "You and I cannot agree. You have your people and I have mine. My father is nobility itself, and yet this whole ignorant community is down on him. They don't allow him the liberty of an honest opinion. They expect him to bow to their antiquated notions, but he won't; he will remain what he is if they kill him."

"I know that, Anne, and I admire him," Arthur said.

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"He has a sterling character, but even such men as he are sometimes mistaken. Now *my* father thinks—"

"Oh, I know what *he* thinks," Anne retorted. "He thinks what you think. You are all the same, like sheep jumping over a fence. You are afraid to be original. You are afraid of advancement and improvement, where your ease and luxury are concerned. I've said all I'm going to say. I only wanted to stop your negroes from what they are doing, but if you are helpless, why—"

A young negro, Cato by name, was leading Arthur's horse toward him. "Ready, Marse Arthur," he called out, with an all but contemptuous glance at Anne. "Dat's er long ride yer got befo' you, suh."

"Take off your hat, you scoundrel!" Arthur commanded. "Don't you see Miss Anne?"

In an instant the slave's hat was off and swinging by his side. "'Scuse me, marster, I done clean forgot!" he said, and yet he spoke reluctantly.

"Don't let that happen again. I mean this!" Arthur demanded, sharply. "Look here, Cato, you and the others must not tease Joe any more as you did last night. Tell the others that if they do I shall have them punished."

"All right, young marster, we won't no mo', suh; I'll try ter keep 'em quiet; but de trufe is, suh, Joe done fetch it on hisse'f. He's er uppity nigger, en so full er brag he's rotten. He say town niggers hain't got no clothes fitten ter wear while de buzzards is eatin' 'em up in de sun. He'll lie when de trufe suit 'im better. He say dat Miss Anne's pa is downright afeard of 'im en dat he is gwine ter set around over dar de res' er his nacherl life en let dem white folks wait on 'im. Huh! talkin' 'bout teasin' en naggin'! why, marster, dat plantation nigger is ernough ter—"

"That will do," Arthur ordered. "Take the horse to the steps. I'm coming right away. You see, Anne," he said, soothingly, "there are two sides even to a

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question of this sort. Even negroes can fall out and disagree. Let's drop this thing. Our friendship must not be broken, no matter what happens."

"We can't be friends so long as your people, black or white, insult my father," Anne returned, frigidly, and she moved away.

It was as if he had an impulse to follow her farther, but failed to obey it. "All right, Anne," he said. "I'll do all I can to please you. You may be sure of that."

She made no reply, but proudly strode away. He stood for a moment where she had left him, and then, with a shrug of his broad shoulders and a grave countenance, he passed through the gate, mounted his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE morning Andrew Merlin came home from the Square carrying a new woodsman's ax under his arm. He did not take it into the house, but went around to the back yard where Joe sat in the shade of an apple-tree. Seeing him, the negro lifted his somnolent eyes, stared half inquiringly, and then looked down.

Merlin held the ax toward him. "Feel the heft o' that," he said. "It's medium weight—not the biggest, nor the littlest. It is good an' sharp."

Wonderingly the slave took the ax into his swarthy hands and tested the bright edge of the metal with his thumb, but he said nothing. It was as if he thought his new master was trying to introduce another of his friendly, almost apologetic talks, which the negro despised as coming from a white man, who ought to be above such procedure with a man in bondage. However, Andrew's next remark was not in that vein.

"Say, get your hat and come with me," Merlin ordered, in a tone and with a stare which seemed somehow to belong to a firmer, more dignified individual than Merlin hitherto had shown himself to be.

Joe hesitated, but finally went into his room, got his hat, and slouched out.

"Throw off that Sunday-go-to-meetin' coat and dinky necktie." Merlin was surveying him from head to foot with disapproval. "You won't need 'em on this trip. You are struttin' too much, anyway, since you tuck board an' room at the 'Merlin Hotel.' Your way o' livin'

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has upset the order of every house in town, so they tell me. You an' your remarks are excitin' more comment all about than a new revival preacher or a silver-tongued stump orator. One thing you hammer on is your life of ease an' comfort, an' how plumb foolish an' green in slave matters me an' my folks are. Hurry up an' sluff them duds off."

His wonder now approaching alarm, the slave obeyed, emerging from his room with a dull stare and appearing more like a laborer in his shirt-sleeves.

"Now come on." Merlin threw the ax over his right shoulder and led the way across the stable-yard, through a gate, and into the thicket back of the house. Side by side the two walked deeper and deeper into the wood till they reached a small creek at the foot of a gradual slope outside the village limits.

"Now listen to me." Merlin had lowered the ax and was sweeping his disengaged hand up the stream. "You see this stob that I've driv' in here?" his foot touching a short stake which the slave saw for the first time; "well, you will find 'em all along about a hundred feet apart, more or less. They show the boundaries o' my land. I driv' 'em thar so you can't make a mistake an' have any come-back about it. Now me an' you are to have one solid understandin' an' be done with it. Let's set down on this log," indicating the trunk of a fallen oak, "and have it out, man to man."

The slave sat down after his master had seated himself and appeared quite bewildered by the studied formality of the occasion. Merlin leaned on the handle of the ax. "I'm not going to make any extensive explanations to you, Joe, about why I'm a marked man in this community on account o' your race and a few other things. I started in on that line when you first come, and you put me down as a plumb idiot. But I'll say this much: you are now on my hands, in my charge, and in justice to myself and my family I can't get rid of you. I say I

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can't, and I mean it, though you may think otherwise. You may think that I might sell you, but I hain't in that business. You might go further and think I could give you your freedom papers, but let me tell you something, Joe. Thar doubtless are times whar it would be a fine act to free a black man, but I am sorry to say it wouldn't be so in your case. Why, if I was to turn you loose in this community your influence amongst your kind would be worse than any plague or famine that ever devastated the old Bible lands. You've already showed your hand in tryin' to dissatisfy every darky you've come across, and if you had it in your power to flaunt freedom in their faces this whole section would be in an uproar from end to end. I don't want you—the Lord above knows I don't want you. The God's truth is that you are the biggest white elephant, to be a black one, that ever fell into a feller's hands. Furthermore, if I was to turn you loose you'd starve to death. The whites wouldn't give you work, and your own race would kick you from pillar to post, till thar wasn't a kink o' your wool left. I read about a case like that in a book, an' it was heart-rendin'—the terrible life that poor darky endured. So I am not goin' to shoulder that sort of a responsibility at this stage of the game. I believe slavery is wrong, you understand; but I'll be dad-blasted if I think the Almighty expects me to abolish it *all by myself*. He may want me to lend a hand at it,—sorter start the ball rollin', an' I'm willin' to do what I can in reason, but, as I say—or was about to say—it don't look to me like it would be right to single you out for the prize, an' leave all the rest o' your race with the bag to hold. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I reckon I does."

"Well, I'm glad you do, Joe, for that will help us to get along faster; but here is a point that I'll bet you don't understand, an' that is that the way you've been handled since you come to me has been, an' *is*, the ruination of

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what little character you are endowed with. You nor no other livin' individual can lead a rational life an' set around idle as you've been doin'. You've had so much time on your hands that you have been breedin' devilment ag'in' your own kind an' mine. So since I can't git shet of you in a way that will satisfy my conscience, I've decided to put you to work. Do you understand what I'm drivin' at now?"

"I reckon I does." Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"An' you see that I'm right about it, I reckon?"

"I don't know, suh."

"The devil you don't! See thar you are crooked—everything is all right till work is mentioned an' then you git as ignorant as a new-born babe. By that very thing you prove that you ain't able to take care o' yourse'f. So that's enough o' that. You never have done much real labor, an' you show it by your extra weight, pudgy jaws, an' sluggish movement. You've put on not less than twenty pounds since you come to me, an' if you keep on at that rate you won't be able to stir out o' your tracks. The flies will eat you up, for you won't have energy enough to brush 'em off. So I'm goin' to put you to work. You understand that, I reckon?"

The slave's only answer was a dubious shrug, which, however, did not evince quite so much contempt as his former shrugs had done.

"'Silence gives consent,' " Merlin quoted. "Now as to the job—I've staked off about twenty acres o' this wooded land, an' I want you to cut down every sprout, bush, and tree in it. You must burn up the brush an' cord up the wood in regular fire-length size."

"Huh! I can't chop wood. I never done it in my life," burst from the slave's indignant lips.

"I never did, either, till my old daddy made me, Joe. I remember how he done me once when I shirked the job to go off fishin' with some more boys. He cut 'im a young

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hickory-withe about five feet long—it looked to me like it was ten, I remember; an' with the fust lick across my back he showed me that he knowed how to cut, if I didn't. You may bet your life that I learned woodcraft after that. Now, Joe, I've got to go away for a week. I must be over at my marble-quarry that length o' time, an' when I git home I expect to find a spot cleaned out here big enough for a small garden-patch. Now I want my mind at ease on this matter. You've been enough bother to me, an' I want to take a rest. So the best thing for you to do is to promise me, here an' now, that you will do as I have told you. Will you do it?"

"I never has chopped down no trees. Marse Wilmot never put me at anything but—"

"Don't mention him," Merlin said, sharply. "He is a bankrupt, an' you helped make 'im so. Pride has to have a fall, an' he hit the dust as the Almighty intended from the start. Wilmot ruined you, an' it is fer me to try to git you straight. Now, no ifs nor an's—will you or will you not do this job while I am away?"

The slave hesitated, but feeling the fixed stare of his master on his face, he reluctantly consented.

"Well, it's a bargain, then." Merlin breathed more freely. "Now, I will have to add something. I hate to have to do it, Joe, but you have not exactly *jumped* at this thing, you know, an' in my bones I feel like you may be goin' to shirk the job. So, since you have made *me* a promise, I'm goin' to make *you* one. Joe, if I find out when I git back that you haven't kept your word I'm goin' to punish you. Folks up North are makin' a lots out o' the few lickin's you folks git down here, but that is because they haven't the sense to know that thar ain't no other way of keepin' some o' you within bounds. You kin send a white man to jail, or sue the shirt off his back at court, but you can't do that with a slave. Put a nigger in jail an' he'll have such a good time that all the rest will want

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to be in with 'im. Sue 'im fer stealin' an' you pay all costs to recover your own stuff, an' the nigger will brag about it the rest o' his life. So thar hain't nothin' fer a slave-owner to do but to administer the sort o' punishment that the general run o' blacks don't hanker for. Now, Joe, if, as I say, this work here hain't done when I git back, you'll have me to settle with. I've said it, an' I mean it. You've promised, an' if you lie to me I won't have the least scruple ag'in' punishin' you. In my sight a lie is the worst sin agoin', because it includes the sum an' substance o' all other sins. Now I'll leave you. I won't see you again till I git back. Gi' me your hand on this agreement."

Reluctantly, a great thwarted stare in his somnolent eyes, the slave obeyed. He fumbled the handle of the ax, which his master had turned over to him; rose to his feet as his master got up, and stood with his eyes on the ground. Merlin allowed his own glance to roam about the wood till it rested on a giant poplar near by.

"Tackle that big chap fust," he said. "Let her creen to the right. She's leanin' that way already by choice, and she will make a powerful crash. It is a pretty sight to see 'em quiver an' totter and then fall. You'll find a maul and some iron and wooden wedges in the barn loft. You'll need them when you git ready to split up the lengths. Good-by. I'm goin' to depend on your promise."

Merlin turned and walked back toward the village. When out of sight of the slave he paused to listen. There was no sound of an ax on the still air.

"That don't look exactly like he is daft to begin," he mused, "but I ain't a-goin' to judge 'im too soon. His pride may be holdin' 'im back till I'm out o' earshot. Well, we'll see—we'll see."

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Merlin returned home, a week later, he found Mrs. Dill on the veranda. She had come in to sell some butter and eggs, and had stayed to dinner with Mrs. Merlin. Andrew, after greeting her and his wife with formal hand-shaking, put his carpet-bag down on the floor and took a seat to rest himself. From head to foot he was covered with the dust and grime of the crudest of railway travel.

"How did you find your rock-quarry?" Mrs. Dill asked him. "We heard you had gone over thar."

"I had to oust a squatter who had built a shack on my land," Merlin answered. "He calculated on livin' thar till he got titles to it. As it was, I had to go to law before he'd budge an inch. An' even then he made trouble for me. He circulated all sorts o' reports to the effect that I was goin' to fetch down a whole bunch o' Yankees who was goin' to introduce nigger equality over thar. A mob of mountain chaps come to my shack after dark one night an' made all sorts o' threats. I wasn't one bit scared, an' I talked to 'em so straight that they went off an' left me alone."

"I kin imagine how it was from the way they are talkin' out our way, 'Drew," Mrs. Dill returned, seriously. "They can't talk about anything else but your doin's. They come an' set in our yard at night an' tell all sorts o' tales. I've heard some wildcat statements that 'u'd make a dog laugh—they are so ridiculous, knowin' you as me 'n' Martin does."

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"What are they sayin' now?" Merlin inquired, a slow twinkle of interest in his mild brown eyes.

"Why, it's about the nigger you took to secure your Wilmot debt." Mrs. Dill laughed softly. "They say that you prove what they've always contended, that you never would back up your abolition ideas whar your own pocket was concerned."

"I'm responsible for him takin' Joe," Mrs. Merlin spoke up, in a colorless tone. "I do believe if me and the children hadn't opposed it 'Drew would have set Joe free."

"How is he gittin' along clearin' that land?" Merlin suddenly bethought himself to ask.

"I don't know. I haven't had time to go out there," Ruth returned. "I suppose he is working at it. He leaves here every morning regular after breakfast, with his dinner in a bucket, and comes back about sundown."

"I thought he might do what was right about it," 'Drew said. "I laid the law down to him pretty sharp. I believe I'll walk over thar now an' see what progress he has made. I want to put that land in corn next year. It has a rich, virgin subsoil, an' can be made to produce fifty bushels to the acre."

Leaving the ladies, he went into the house, took a drink from a bucket of water which he drew up from the well, and passed out at the rear door, making his way across the stable-yard and into the wood. As he drew near the spot where he had told Joe to fell the trees he paused to listen, but he heard no sound of ax, maul, or any other tool. He strode on, now suspicious that all was not quite as it should be. Presently he reached the spot where he had parted from Joe. There lay the log on which they had sat. There stood the great poplar untouched. In fact, all the other trees and bushes were standing just as he had left them.

"By gum! the scamp has lied to me!" Merlin muttered. "I wonder whar he is at?"

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He moved on, now headed for the near-by creek, led thither by a knowledge of the habits of the negro race. Presently he heard some one singing a stirring plantation song. It was from the lungs of his human property. He had heard Joe sing before and could not be mistaken in that sonorous quality. When the creek was reached, the first thing that struck Merlin's eye was a long cane fishing-rod with a line and baited hook lying on the grassy bank. Within an arm's length of its sharpened butt, under a spreading beech, a human form lay prone save for a flat, bare foot which rested on a knee and was gracefully beating time to the melody. It was the delinquent black, and as Merlin silently surveyed him his features settled into offended gravity. The song died away. Joe sat up, evidently with the intention of fishing some more, for he grasped the rod and was drawing it to him when his master stepped forward.

"Hello!" Merlin cried. "How are you, Joe? What sort o' luck are you havin'? Are they bitin' good to-day?"

The fine form of the slave seemed to shrink together in abject surprise. He batted his eyes rapidly, looked down sheepishly, seemed to hesitate in bewilderment, and then said: "Not a bite, suh."

"Maybe you scared 'em off with your singin'," Merlin said, dryly. "I heard you away back in the woods. Well, Joe, I've just got home. I was talkin' to my wife, an' she said you'd been comin' out here regular every day. I was powerful glad to hear it. What sort o' progress have you made with the task I set for you? I've got a market for that firewood. I'm goin' to sell it to the flour-mill."

The slave had the hook in his pliant fingers, and carefully examined the worm he was putting on it. He spat upon it, in obedience to a superstitious belief that human saliva attracted the fish. After this, he swung the rod well out over the stream and let the weighted line settle, and the old cork bottle-stopper float on the water.

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"Did you hear what I asked you, Joe?" Merlin demanded.

"Yas, suh—oh yas, suh! I done heard you, suh."

"Well, why didn't you answer me?"

"I tol' you I couldn't cut down no trees," the slave said, half defiantly. "Marse Wilmot never in all his life—"

"Hold thar!" cried Merlin. "Never mind about that feller. What he did an' what I do is plumb different. Don't forgit that thar has been a change of administration. He was a rabid slaveholder, an' I'm—I'm—well, I'm an abolitionist. I believe in the abolition o' laziness in white or black. Now how about the work you promised on your honor (sech as you've got) to have done while I was away on my trip?"

"I can't cut down no trees," Joe repeated, stubbornly. "Marse Wilmot hat me ter drive his ca'ge, en he'p 'im out in de big house w'en quality folks come ter visit 'im."

"I wonder if he ever had you to lie fer 'im," Merlin said, his broad lip twitching with anger. "You must o' learnt it some'r's, fer you told me a big one. Now listen to me." Merlin sat down on the protruding roots of the beech and leaned back against its smooth trunk. "Joe, right now I'm scoldin' you about lyin', an' if I don't look out I'll lie myself. I must guard ag'in' that, whatever I do. Now I said to you a week ago that if you didn't keep your word I was goin' to punish you. An' I'm here to state that I am not goin' to lie for you nor nobody else. I've jest come through that tract I marked out with stakes, an' as far as I can see you hain't so much as cut a sourwood sprout. Now you've had your good time. You're fed on the fat o' the land, an' been lyin' around here snoozin' in the sun till your flesh is hangin' in lumps on your bones, an' your eyes are shinin' with the light o' old Nick hisse'f. Now you set whar you are till I git back. I'm jest goin' into that thicket thar to cut me a stout hickory. I wouldn't do it, Joe, but I can't see

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no way out of it but to give you a few larrups like my old daddy used to lay on me, an' which done me more good than anything else I ever run across. My Yankee friends would have the laugh on me, I reckon; but if they was here to look the situation over they would advise me to go ahead. Wilmot held a rod over you, an' you respected 'im. I've spared the rod since you fell to me, an' you are sp'iled so bad you smell a mile off. Some'n' has to be done, an' thar ain't nothin' else in sight. The Lord has shoved you on me, an' I'm goin' to try to keep you from dyin' of the dry rot. You wait a minute. I'll be back."

Inwardly calm, and yet trembling with excitement, Merlin went into the thicket, and with his big pocket-knife cut a slender sprout of young hickory about four feet in length, and as he stood trimming the smaller branches off, he said to himself: "I'll jest tickle his hide a little. I wouldn't draw blood or make a welt for anything."

He returned to the sullen negro, the switch in his hand. The eyes of the two met steadily, the stare ending when Joe began to shrug his shoulders and sniff derisively.

"Huh! You may snort now," Merlin said, "but maybe you'll do some'n' else in a few minutes. Now, before we begin this shindig, Joe, I want to ask you if you've got anything to say—any statement to make as to why I ought not to keep my word for you breakin' yours. Have you got anything to say?"

"I hain't got nothin' ter say ter *you*," answered the slave. "What I got ter say I'm gwine ter say ter *de Lawd*."

"Oh, you are a-goin' to talk to the Lord," said Merlin. "I see, I see."

"I done been talk ter 'im ever since you lef' home," the slave went on. "Ever' night I pray ter 'im, en remin' 'im er what you say you gwine ter do in case I don't cut down dem trees when you got back. I don't hatter go ter *you*. I go straight ter *him*, en he tells me what ter do."

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"Oh, I see, an' he told you to fish, an' lie here flat o' your back all day long, did he? Well, the Good Book says he took a rest hisse'f once, but it was after a bigger job was finished than you ever tackled. An' as fer tellin' you to fish, looks like he ort to think better of the fish he created than to let a yellow hulk like you lie in wait for 'em. Stan' up Joe. I'll let yore shirt stay on this time. I'm new at this business, anyway, an' I want it over with. If I hadn't gone an' said I'd do this job maybe I'd avoid it—I say I might, but I don't know, for the situation is one of the oddest I ever got into. Stand out here in the sun. I used to talk a lot ag'in' whippin' slaves, but a body has to live and learn, and the Lord knows some'n' had to be done in your case."

Joe made a movement which his master thought would result in his rising to his feet, but it did not. Instead, the negro simply knelt on the ground, his face toward the trunk of the beech, folded his hands in front of him, and rolled his eyes heavenward.

CHAPTER XVI

“O LAWD,” he began to pray in the mellow, singsong tone he had formerly used with such wonderful effect in meeting, “keep dis white man quiet till I git clean thoo. I bin comin’ ter you night en day wid my gre’t, secret trouble, en you bin tellin’ me ter wait patient, en stan’ my load er pain, like you done put on de chullum er Israel; like you done put on Joseph in de pit; Daniel in de lion-den, en Job on his ash-pile, en I is done my bes’ ter stan’ everything wid patience. O Lawd, you know my secret—you know what is chawin’ my vitals out, like er rat in er feed-box. You know it, en nobody else do, fer I don’t hatter tell it ter er livin’ soul. You know what my pride is. You know how I feel ’bout dis here awful change in my life. You know it is too much of er come-down ter ax of any decent black man. Here I am in bondage ter er man dat talk er lot erbout freedom, when he is up Norf, but is as deep in de mud when de shoe is on his foot as de rest um is in de mire. You know what I is been axin’ you ter gi’ me all erlong, but whether you gwine ter do it is yo’ own business—dy will be done, in heaven, as it is done on earth, en you know it is bad ernough in my case. Dat white man is standin’ dar wid his hat on while I’m prayin’ ter you on my knees, but dat is his own lookout. Mo’ dan dat, he’s holdin’ er switch in his han’ like he think he’s gwine ter lay it on me. Shucks, I say! Lawd, listen ter me, en open his hearin’, too, fer he certainly is deaf. You know my secret. You know me thoo en thoo, even what Marse Wilmot never did guess at.

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You know what's mo'. You know you didn't gi' me de strength in dese yer arms en in dis yer body fer nothin'. You know, en dis white man will know purty soon, if he don't drap dat switch, dat I ain't gwine let no man, white or black, strike me, 'kase I wouldn't do his biddin' en chop down trees, new as I is at de business. Now, Lawd, gi' me de strength er Goliath ter meet dis here white man. Le' me mash 'im 'twixt my fingers same as I would er stingin' hoss-fly, ef he dare ter tech me. Dy will be done. Amen."

An indescribable, thwarted expression lay on Merlin's strong face as the negro rose and stood looking at him, his brawny arms crossed on his great chest. "You mean that you are goin' to resist me, Joe?" he said, half smiling over his own predicament.

"Me en de Lawd tergether is gwine ter," the slave said, firmly. "Maybe you got as much strength as I have *one* way, but you fall short in another. De Lawd is on *my* side, en if you think you gwine ter lash me you is powerful mistaken, ef I'm any judge. I know my secret trouble en you don't."

"Your secret trouble?" Merlin was ready to lean upon any pretext to delay the ordeal he was facing. "I don't like to whip any man, Joe, till I fully understand him. Do you mind tellin' me what the thing is that you keep talkin' about?"

"Ef I told you it wouldn't be a secret," Joe jerked out. "My secret is *my* secret. You don't hatter know it. I know one thing, dough, you ain't er gwine ter hit me wid dat switch—not er single tap. Ef you want to start de game, sail in. I'm ready fer you. We hain't got no witenesses but one, but he is ernough, in all conscience. He knows me a lot better 'n you does. He done give Samson strength one time, en he will do de selfsame ter me. I feel his power clean thoo me fum my fingers ter my toes."

"Say, Joe," Merlin proposed, sheepishly tapping the

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grass with the tip of his switch. "I want to talk to you. 'Twixt your bodily threats and your heavenly communion you've got me in a dark corner, and I'm free to say that I want light. I want everything I do to be open an' aboveboard, an' this here 'secret' business kinder knocks me out. Tell me about it."

"I won't tell nobody," growled the slave as he sank down again and folded his arms over his upright knees.

"You say you won't?" Merlin said, nearing the end of his resources. "Well, tell me this, Joe. Why did you promise me to do that job?"

"I hadn't thought erbout it—I hadn't prayed over it. I was blin', but now I see. De Lawd come ter me in de night."

"You say he did?" Merlin's lips twitched in mild amusement. "Well, I must say he hain't never honored me with a visit, night or day. I may not be as worthy of it as you are. Listen to me, Joe"—Merlin bent the switch to break it, but failing to do so on account of its pliancy, he suddenly threw it from him. "You are just a poor, benighted black man, but you have had the power to-day to make me take a straighter look at myself than I ever got before. Joe, I had a sneakin' feelin' that I wasn't doin' exactly right when I cut that hickory, but I rebelled ag'in' it an' went on with my intentions. When I fetched the switch out an' showed it to you it was more like a bluff than any act I've been guilty of since away back in my boyhood fisticuff days. Now I have talked abolition for years, an' been ag'in' one man holdin' power over another, but, as you said jest now, as soon as it come home to me I went back on my principles. I hain't a-goin' to tetch you, Joe. As you set thar in all your loneliness, separated from your own kind an' the white folks you've learnt to love an' honor, I'm downright sorry fer you. Now I want to be your friend. The law gives me the legal right to direct your conduct, but laws some-

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times become obsolete, an' I kin look far enough ahead to see that this law will some day be that way. Still, Joe, with all that, I can't see how I can act otherwise just now than to keep you with me. I couldn't turn you loose—I simply couldn't. You ain't prepared for the change. You are as helpless as a child before a rushin' engine. I believe I can help you more right now by holdin' on to you, and furnishin' you with grub and a place to sleep, and teachin' you a few things. Now come down to brass tacks. You admit, I reckon, that you ought to be at some sort o' work, don't you?"

"Yas, suh." The tone was respectful for the first time, and Merlin noted it with an increasing sense of humility. "Yas, suh, ef I stay on wid you I ought ter work."

"Well, then, Joe, how about this? Suppose we come to an agreement. You and me are partners under this cloud that is over us both. As God is my judge, I'd free you if I could, but I can't do it. I hain't the backbone. I hain't exactly my own boss. My wife and children don't want to disrupt things here at Delbridge any more than I have already, and to free you would be to make life unbearable for them. So how would it suit you at present, at least, just to do the things about the place that you feel ought to be done by you? I know from experience that work done without a finger in the pie yourself is not pleasant. My daddy used to make me hoe and plow when I was a boy, and it was like pullin' eye-teeth. But when I growed up and saw profit to me in every lick I struck, the same work was agreeable enough. So now I'm goin' to propose an odd thing. Every dratted slaveholder in the South would laugh at me for it, but, as I see it, it is sound sense. Joe, from this day on you can help me or not, just as you see fit. You've got sense; you kin see whar your duty lies. You say the Lord is directin' you, an' if so, I hope he will keep it up."

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The slave was touched. His whole being seemed to have softened as he sat gazing at the speaker.

"I didn't know er white man could be dat way," he faltered. "I know you got troubles, 'ca'se I done hear folks talk erbout you en what you is goin' thoo. I want ter do my part, en I will—I will. I know you can't free me. I hain't hoped fer dat. I've hat ol' Nick in me all erlong since I made dis change. I will do better fum now on."

"All right, Joe, now we are talkin' like two rational human beings. You are free to lay your hand to any work you see, or not, just as it suits you. We'll see how it comes out. Somehow I feel like our arrangement is the best that can be made. If my wife, or Bob, or Anne give you any disagreeable orders, come to me an' I'll fix it. I'll talk it over with 'em, an' I'm sure they will act in harmony with me. Of course, I am not keepin' my word about that punishment I spoke of before I went away, an' I can't remember when I've broken my word in a long time, but that will have to pass. I ought to 'a' thought before I spoke so glib. I was at fault there. Now it is time I was back home."

Merlin rose, and as he did so the slave rose also. "Marse Merlin," he began, his full lips twitching, "I'm sorry I been actin' lak I was. You is my frien'. De Lawd done sent you ter me in answer ter my prayer. I kin wuk fer er man lak you is. You watch me en see."

"All right, Joe; it all lies with you. In every way but one you are a free man. I begin to see now why you liked Wilmot so much. He trusted you, an' let you have your own way."

"Yas, suh, dat was it, en I didn't fall short, suh. I'm gwine ter do right wid you, too. I know what's ter be done, en I'll do it. You'll see dat de bes' way is not ter drive er nigger lak a ox. He knows he is er man; let 'im act lak one."

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The sun was almost down behind the western hills as Merlin trudged back toward the village in the slanting red rays. "Poor fellow!" he thought. "He is a human bein' now, but I come in an inch o' makin' a ragin' demon out o' him, an' me as well; for if I'd started at 'im with that switch me 'n' him 'u'd 'a' rolled about an' pawed up the turf like two Rocky Mountain tigers. He'd 'a' made me look like a human poultice-plaster before he was through. I seed that in his eye. When niggers fight they are like wild beasts; they smell blood an' want to drink it. I don't think I was afeard of him. It wasn't that. It was beca'se he had a moral right to resist me. Thar was more of God in 'im right then, black as he is, than thar was in me. He made me knuckle; but a man can't serve his Maker without that. Joe is as much a child o' God as I am, an' if I don't treat 'im as such I'll be an outcast myself."

CHAPTER XVII

THE next morning Merlin was up before day. He stole softly down the front stairs and went around the house to Joe's cabin. The slave was not yet out, but his master could hear him moving about inside. Presently the door opened and Joe, in his roughest clothing, appeared and stood yawning and stretching himself sleepily. Merlin wanted to beat a retreat, but it was too late; the negro had seen him. "You are out early," Merlin said.

"Yas, suh, but de cool er de day is de bes' time fer wuk dis time er de year."

"Yes, I always found it so," Merlin answered, rather awkwardly. It was on his tongue to inquire what sort of work Joe had in mind, but he wisely checked himself.

The slave glanced toward the yellowing sky above the hills in the east and yawned again. "I tol' ol' mis' dat I wanted ter git er early start, en she done put up two snacks in my dinner-bucket fer me, one fer breakfast, en t'other fer dinner."

"I don't know as it is any o' my business," Merlin said, slowly, "that is, considerin' our agreement, you remember, but maybe thar won't be no great harm in axin' what you have on the program fer ter-day. I don't mind tellin' you what *I* have to do, that is, if you care to know."

"Yo' business is yo' business," Joe returned. "It wouldn't do me no good ter dabble in it any mo' n fer you ter dabble in mine. You will soon see what I'm gwine ter do. I feel mo' like er fightin'-cock 'an I has in many er long day."

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"That's all right, go ahead in your own way," Merlin smiled. "Whatever you do will be up to the mark, I'll bet."

He went to the stable-yard to see if some fine hens of his had laid any eggs, and as he was returning he saw Joe, with his dinner-pail in his hand and an ax on his shoulder, starting toward the woods. "He's goin' to tackle that big poplar," Merlin chuckled. "Thar are more ways to kill a cat than to choke it to death. Gosh! look at the stride he's got on 'im."

That morning about ten o'clock Merlin's curiosity got the better of him. He tried valiantly to resist the temptation to spy on Joe, but finally gave in to it. He was determined not to be seen, so he fairly crept, like a trapper of pioneer days, through the wood in the direction of the spot where he had planned the clearing. Presently, when he was within sight of the poplar, he heard the steady whack of the ax.

"He's at it like the woods afire," Merlin chuckled, "but he hain't plumb got the hang of it yet—the ax don't go in straight every time—but he will learn. I'd go show him a thing or two, but that 'u'd not be wise. He is his own boss for the time bein', anyway. I wonder what Tom's set would think of me as an overseer an' slaveholder combined. This 'u'd make'em so mad they couldn't see straight."

Less fearful of discovery, now that Joe was occupied, Merlin walked on till he was within a few yards of the wood-cutter. Only a few dogwood and sassafras bushes stood between him and the slave, and by peering carefully through their branches he was enabled to see the toiling black man. Joe had taken off his shirt to free his arms, and stood swinging the ax out from him and driving it into the enormous and yet too irregular gap he had cut into the great trunk of the poplar.

"Powerful poor work!" Merlin muttered. "Looks like

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a child had done it with a hatchet, but he'll catch on—he'll learn in time."

Merlin had turned to steal away when he noticed that the chopping had ceased and he paused to listen. To his surprise he heard a sharp cry of pain from the negro, and then all was quiet. Going back to the place where he could see through the branches, he saw Joe bending forward, the ax at his feet, his hands clasped about his left knee.

"He has hurt hisse'f!" Merlin exclaimed, all but aloud; and then no longer thinking of concealment, he plunged through the bushes to the side of the negro.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" he cried, and then he saw the blood flowing freely down a leg of the slave's pants, and noticed a damp slit in the cloth just above the knee.

Joe was groaning in pain and looked up. "My ax slipped en hit my leg, suh," he said. "It is sharp en went clean ter de bone. I'm losin' blood."

"Quick! Le' me rip your pant-leg open. We must stop that flow. You may have cut an artery. Lie down an' stretch out."

The slave obeyed, wincing with pain, an ashen look on his distorted face. With his pocket-knife Merlin hastily slit the cloth and exposed the wound.

"Runnin' like a fresh-water spring," he muttered, in dismay. "I must stop that or you will bleed to death. I must tie something tight around it. Here, I'll use my galluses—they will have to do." And throwing off his coat, and unbuttoning his home-knitted suspenders, he twisted and tied them tightly above the wound. "That is certainly a bad cut, Joe," he said, in deep concern. "Now I've got to get you home, an' have a doctor attend to this right off. You can't walk—you will start the flow again if you do."

"Maybe I kin limp erlong," suggested the slave. "No harm to try, anyway."

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"All the harm in the world," Merlin objected. "See if you kin stand up, then make a crutch out o' me. I kin hold you up."

Joe obeyed, swinging the wounded member free from the ground, and Merlin supported him. It was a very slow journey back home, broken by many pauses to rest.

"I'm altogether to blame fer this," Merlin suddenly said, in self-reproach, during one of the pauses. "I put you at that tree with that keen tool, an' I was as dead wrong as if I'd put a baby to play with a razor. Say, you seem to think the Almighty directs everything—what do you reckon he means by lettin' this thing happen?"

"I hain't hat time ter think erbout it yit," the slave answered, as one in authority in such matters.

"Well, I have," Merlin said. "I reckon a guilty conscience makes a man think quicker than in ordinary times, and I know one thing, and it is this, Joe: I feel as mean as an egg-suckin' dog caught in the act. How about movin' on now? If you will crawl up on my back I'll tote you. I can do it easy, if you will just git high enough up to balance me right."

"We was doin' well enough, Marse 'Drew," Joe said, faintly. "One mo' lap en we'll be dar."

"Well, don't call me 'master,'" Merlin said. "Durned if I don't believe you are every bit as much my master, in one way, as I am yours in another. Thar is some'n' odd in this whole mix-up, Joe. I hain't got it plumb straight yet."

Slowly they made their way homeward, and when the slave was finally put to bed, Merlin sent for a doctor. The doctor said that an artery had been cut, that a part of the bone had been shattered, and that it would require time for complete healing. Merlin said nothing to any one as to his feelings in regard to the accident, but he himself took the food out to Joe at each meal. It was a strange

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friendship that was born that day, and it grew and ripened as the days of the slave's confinement passed.

One evening Merlin had left the family on the veranda and gone around to Joe's cabin and was chatting with the convalescing slave quite as he might have done with a most intimate friend. Presently Joe said:

"You done tol' me er lots erbout yo'se'f, Marse 'Drew, but I hain't never tol' you all I been thoo by er long shot. Dar is one 'ticular thing I hain't never yit tol' anybody, 'cep' de Lawd. Seem lak nobody but de Lawd could understan' it thoo en thoo."

"I reckon you are talkin' about that great secret o' yours now," Merlin ventured, tentatively. "I hain't never insisted on hearin' that—for thar are passages in every life, white or black, that are too sacred to bear the light o' exposure to the general run. I know it's been that way with me."

Joe nodded his head slowly, and sighed. He was silent for a moment, and then he said: "I've always felt lak tellin' somebody, en, Marse 'Drew, you sho is been a true frien' ter me. I didn't know de time 'u'd ever come when I'd see you in dat light. I'm free ter say dat when I fus' come ter you I hated de bare sight er you en everybody erbout dis place, but it is plumb diffunt now. Yas, suh, dat so—plumb diffunt! You ain't lak Marse Wilmot; you ain't lak any big-quality nigger-owner I ever seed; but you is lak er rail, downright Christian man. I never knowed dar could be sech er man es you. I've l'arnt er sight since you been tellin' me erbout whar you been up Norf, en de way dem Yankees look on bondage. En wid it all, suh, you done show me 'zactly how you is fixed yo'se'f amongst dese white folks dat don't think de same es you do. My Lawd! you has got a hard road to hoe, 'long wid yo' own brother en yo' wife en fambly ergin you, en I'm here ter say, Marse 'Drew, dat I wants ter he'p you out. En es de Lawd is my judge, when I git on

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my feet I is gwine ter stir myse'f en do my full part by you."

"But—but, Joe," Merlin's insistent voice was wavering, "that secret matter o' yours, does that still make you unhappy? Somehow I judge from what you've said from time to time that it is still uppermost in your thoughts."

"I try not ter think erbout it," the negro answered, sighing again. "It don't do no good ter cry over spilt milk, en dat—well, seem lak I never is gwine ter see 'er no mo', en so—en so—"

"See *her*? See *who*?" Merlin broke in, urgently.

"Dat was er slip er my lip, suh," Joe said, in no little embarrassment. "Fust thing I know you will guess what 'tis. Well, well, it's gone too fur now, 'Marse Drew, en I believes I'll tell yer en be done wid it."

"I wish you would, if it is about a sweetheart," Merlin answered, musingly. "That is one thing I believe in, but I didn't dream that you'd ever had such a thing."

Joe turned his face away. The moon was coming out from behind some drifting clouds and the pale light rested on his bare, yellow brow, and glistened. "I'm gwine tell you how 'twas," he faltered. "I'm er funny darky, Marse 'Drew, 'kase I never was much of er hand ter go wid any one gal regular. I was a sorter general man wid um all at de corn-shuckin's en shindigs. Marse Wilmot tried ter 'suade me ter marry, but de ones he picked out didn't strack me des right, en I begged 'im ter 'scuse me. But one day it come ter me, suh, same I reckon as it did ter you one time in yo' life!"

"You mean you saw somebody in particular that you liked?" Merlin suggested, sympathetically.

"Dat's it—yas, suh, I did. I sho did; en she wa'n't lak de common sort. She was er shade lighter 'n I is, en de prettiest, spryest gal on 'er feet you ever laid eyes on. Her marster en mist'ess—big, rich, high-up quality folks,

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de Pelhams—come on er visit to we-all fum Richmond, Virginy, en Delia was de maid dat dey fetch erlong. Dar wasn't much ter do den 'cept high carryin'-on by de white folks at we-all's house, en generally Delia went wid 'er mist'ess ter de country parties, en I had ter drive de ca'ge en wait on my marster, so me 'n' Delia was ter-gether er lots fer two mont's er mo'."

"I see," intoned Merlin, bending forward, "an' it was love on both sides?"

"Yas, suh, Marse 'Drew, 'twas," Joe sighed, heavily, "but we hat ter part. Marse Pelham hat ter take his fam'ly back ter Virginy, en Delia went wid um. She wanted ter stay en marry me, but my marster was short er money en couldn't buy 'er, en Marse Pelham hat done set some er his niggers free en was not willin' ter buy me. Delia could write letters—her ol' mis' give 'er lessons, same as my mist'ess did me—en she sent me one ever' week. She wanted me ter git Marșe Wilmot ter sen' me ter Richmond, so we could git married. I mentioned it several times ter 'im, but he was in so much trouble dat it went in at one ear en out. He didn't know how I felt, nohow. Den, Marse 'Drew, what you reckon happened? Des er couple er mont's back Marse Pelham set Delia free, en she is now makin' er fine livin' in Boston. She keeps writin' me letters en wants me ter come if I kin manage it. She say dar is powerful few darkies in dat city en she hain't never yit met one dat she wants 'cep' me."

"I see, I see," the white man said. "Joe, that is a purty tale—as purty a one as I ever read or heard tell of. I understand you better now, and I'm glad you told me about it. I don't wonder at the way you pouted and sulked when Wilmot dumped you on me, with all that on your mind. For all I know to the contrary, you may love this Delia every bit as deep as that white feller Romeo away back in history did the gal he was so bent on gettin'.

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I reckon if you was to—to get your freedom you could make your livin' up thar in Boston?"

"Oh yas, suh, Delia says dar is plenty er work at good prices up dar."

Merlin rose. The moonlight in which he stood seemed to flow over him like an all-pervading, spiritual essence. "Yes, that is a nice tale, Joe," he repeated, musingly. "And I think I see why you kept it back from me so long. You didn't want to look like you was beggin' me for some'n' that would be hard for me to give."

"Dat's it, marster," Joe admitted. "You couldn't 'ford ter gi'me my freedom, 'kase de white folks here would raise such er row. Ef you was er big rich man, now, lak some um in Virginy, 'twould be diffant."

"That's the point, Joe. Say, have you got a picture o' that yaller girl?"

"Yas, suh, I'll git it out en show it ter you in de mawnin', dough it hain't like 'er. You hatter see Delia face ter face to know what she's like, Marse 'Drew. She is sweet en gentle, en good, suh—dat way, ter white en black."

"Well, good night, Joe. I'll turn in. It is past my bed-time. You must show me that picture. I want to see it."

"I will in de mawnin', Marse 'Drew. Good night, suh."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE next day Andrew met his brother in the yard of the court-house, and they paused and stood talking in the restrained way that was characteristic of them both.

"I want to consult you about a particular thing, Tom," Andrew began, leading the planter to one side on the grass, "and I hope you will give me a few minutes. It hain't business this time."

Thomas consented and patiently bowed his head to listen. He was dressed in the height of the period's fashion, even to the gold-headed ebony cane and gloves he carried in his soft hands. Scarcely a greater contrast could be imagined, for Andrew was without coat, his lips were stained with tobacco, his old gray slouch-hat needed brushing, and his coarse shoes were coated with dust.

"Well, what is it?" Thomas asked, his eyes on the street. "Judge Tompkins has invited me to dinner, and it is about time for me to drive down."

"You've got plenty o' time," Andrew said, nervously. "Tom, I reckon you've heard about the nigger that Wilmot forced on me when he broke up and went off?"

"Who hasn't, I wonder?" sniffed the planter, his eyes flashing resentfully. "It is the joke of the whole country. They even dare tease me about it. Hundreds of tales are in circulation about it. It looks like ordinary ideas of decency would keep you from making of yourself such a butt of public ridicule."

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"Now look here, Tom," Andrew flared up on his part, "if we are goin' to talk this over like law-abidin' men you've got to keep your nasty temper in check. I won't let you insult me—I'll be damned if I will."

"Well, what did you want to say?" Thomas asked, stiffly. "You haven't the least idea how irritating everything you do or say really is of late."

"I started to tell you about Joe," Andrew answered. "I don't want to keep 'im."

"Well, you know how I'm fixed." Thomas failed to see his brother's drift. "You know I have more slaves already than I can take care of. But you can sell him easy enough; there are plenty of buyers in the market."

"I don't want to sell 'im—that ain't the point," said Andrew, averting his troubled eyes.

"Well, what is it, then?" Larkin had arrived at the gate with the carriage, and the planter now signaled to him with his stick. "Wait there, I'm coming!" he called out.

"I see you are in a hurry"—Andrew spat on the grass and brought his troubled gaze back to his brother's frowning face—"and it would take some little time to make you see my perdicament. I'd have to tell you the whole thing from start to finish. I'd have to add to it the sad tale Joe told me about hisse'f an' a certain free gal he run across. I'd have to tell you how awful I am upset—so awful, to tell you the truth, Tom, that last night I didn't close my eyes for more than an hour all told. Tom, I want to do a thing that you won't like—that all your sort won't like. I want to set that nigger free an' sen' 'im to Boston to marry the gal o' his choice."

Thomas Merlin stared almost incredulously into the face before him—the face which in some features resembled his own. "My God!" he cried. "You don't mean it?"

"I just do—that's the point," Andrew replied. "I

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haven't fully made up my mind, though. I waver back and forth like a blade o' corn in shiftin' winds. As the Lord is my judge, I don't know what to do. I feel like the Lord is tellin' me, in the same low voice that he used to Moses on the mount, to treat this black feller as I would want to be treated myself, an' yet when I look all around me and see the hubbub an' stink it would raise, I fall back as weak as a sick kitten that has been left out all night in a cold, drenchin' rain. Why, even my own wife an' son—"

"If you do it—if you make such a jackass of yourself," broke in Thomas, furiously, "if you turn traitor to your country and throw dung in the faces of me and my friends, like that, I'll never speak to you again as long as you live, and *my* children shall not speak to *your* children. You have already been an eyesore and a drawback to me for years. I have managed to rise in the community and keep my head up, but you stay down in the mire. There is a low streak in you. You are a sow's ear that never can be made into a silk purse."

"Stop!" thundered Andrew, white with rage. "Do you remember the day I hit you on the head with a hoe-handle when we were boys? I'm older now, but I feel like it again, Tom. I was a fool to come to you for advice. I'll act as I think best, an' you may go to the devil, for all I care. I know one thing, though, an' that is that the very spirit you've got at this minute is the spirit that is goin' to lead you an' your sort into lastin' trouble with this vast country of ours."

Quivering from head to foot, and pale, Thomas waved to his servant. "I'm coming," he muttered, haughtily, and without another word to his brother he turned and walked away.

That evening Andrew joined his wife and Robert on the veranda. The boy was her favorite child, and she had placed her chair close to his and persuaded him to

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put his head into her lap. She was stroking back his long hair tenderly with her work-hardened fingers, and now and then using a baby term as she bent over his face.

"I've got some'n' to tell you," Merlin began, as he seated himself on the top step of the veranda and allowed his hands to hang downward between his knees in a habitual posture. "It is about our slave Joe."

Hearing this, Robert drew himself up and stared curiously, while his mother sat silent and expectant. Andrew began, slowly and hesitatingly, to recount the incident of Joe's cutting himself. It was as if he wanted particularly to explain the effect the thing had had upon his emotions and conscience, and yet could not find words for its expression, for there were awkward lapses in his talk of which he seemed half ashamed.

"He cut himself because he was mad at you," Ruth said, coldly. "I knew that all along. He was as spiteful as a snake. He didn't intend to cut so deep, but he did it on purpose. As it is, it has cost us a doctor's bill, and he has been fed on the fat of the land, and you—really, you have acted queerly—taking his food to him and staying hours at a time with him. Such a thing as that has never been heard of anywhere in the South. When you took him I thought he would be a help, but, on the contrary, he has lived like a prince of royal blood, and Anne and I have done double work."

"You don't understand—you don't understand at all," Andrew faltered. He heard Anne coming through the hall behind him, and he looked at her over his shoulder as if for verbal aid. "I was tellin' your ma about Joe," he said to the girl as she sat down close to him on the step. "I've been through what I call almost the biggest experience I ever had with a human being in my dealin's with that feller since he was laid up. I couldn't expect you three to see it as I see it, neither. You see, I've been about the world a lot, an' you hain't—then Joe has opened

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hisse'f out to me in a way that he hain't done to any other person, if I can believe his statement."

Mrs. Merlin laughed out impulsively. "He is simply amusing himself with you to pass away the time. He is fooling you good, 'Drew. He knows better than to try it on me or any one else."

"I knowed you'd sniff an' sneer—I was prepared for that," Merlin sighed. He looked at his daughter, but she was staring straight ahead of her, and contributed nothing to the argument. At this moment Robert spoke.

"Why are folks making so much fun of us all?" he demanded. "Are we the scabs of the country? I met Cousin George on the street the other day and he barely spoke to me—looked like he was ashamed to be seen with me, and hurried away with some other boys."

"You mustn't pay no attention to what folks say," Merlin advised, in a faint voice. "Since time begun the man that did plumb right has been scoffed at and ridiculed by others. Now listen. Don't break in. I'm goin' to tell you Joe's tale clean through as he told it to me, and then you will see why I'm upset like I am."

It was a lame, disjointed story that Merlin managed to struggle through. If he had not been ashamed to display his emotions his delivery might have had a truer ring; but as it was the account certainly fell flat with at least two of his audience. Anne had done a queer thing during the most labored part of the recital. She had slid her slender hand into one of his and pressed his fingers, but remained silent.

"Well, what is it all about?" her mother demanded, wonderingly. "What if he *did* want the girl? What if she *did* want him? They couldn't get married while she was a slave, you say, and now that she is free and living up there he ought to have enough sense, nigger though he is, to know that—"

"Right thar is the rub." Andrew felt Anne's fingers

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twining about his own, but was too much troubled to realize what their insistent pressure meant. "You see, it has hit me as a matter o' pure conscience. I don't know, you see, but what the Lord intends the two to get married, an' if I let my personal interests block the way, well, I'll be to blame."

"To blame?" Mrs. Merlin repeated. "You can't mean that you are seriously thinking—"

"Of freein' 'im? Yes, you've hit it!" Merlin blurted out, almost desperately. "And not only that, Ruth, but I'm thinkin' o' gettin' 'im the proper passport an' payin' his way to Boston. I hain't mentioned it to him yet, you know—I hain't gone that far; but as I see it, in my own soul, and facin' God and his eternal law and order, I don't see no other course."

At this Robert stamped his foot heavily and sprang up. "You've lost your senses!" he cried. "I'm ashamed to call you 'father.' You—"

Andrew half rose to his feet, panting with fury. "Say another word, you young whelp, and I'll get me a hickory and thrash the hide off of you."

Muttering furiously, the boy turned into the house and his father did not follow him. There was silence for a moment, and then it was broken by sobs from the hall. Robert was leaning on the balustrade of the stairs, crying. His mother rose, a cold mantle of resentment on her.

"I don't blame the child!" she hurled at her husband. "How can he help it? The whole country is making fun of us as it is, and now you propose something more silly than ever. The Lord only knows what you will think up next. Hush, darling." She was now in the hall with her son. "Go to bed. You are not to blame for anything your father does."

Anne's hand was pressing her father's again, and now more insistently, but in the vast surge of his perplexity he was oblivious to it. He rose and, leaving his daughter,

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he walked out to the fence. He heard the cooing of his wife's voice, the spasmodic sobbing of his son, and his being was rent to depths hitherto undisturbed. He looked up at the sky, as if desiring to pray, and yet the sky, which had been his symbol of God's vastness and power, seemed unreceptive, unresponsive. He had once thought that he had heard God's voice whispering as to the course he should take in this matter, but the vastness arching over him gave no hint of guidance to-night. And yet was he not to be answered, in some measure? Was the soothing creature who was now approaching not to be the medium between him and the silent vastness?

"Father," Anne began, firmly, as she slid her arm around his waist. "The others are against you, but I am not. I love you. I understand you, and I thank Heaven that I do. I know Joe's story as if he had told it to me himself. I can fancy you listening to it and weeping with sympathy down in your great, gentle, unselfish heart."

"Anne, Anne, child!" he all but sobbed, "do you mean what you say? Do you—do you?"

"Yes, father, and there is but one thing for you to do. You must not shrink back from what you feel in your heart to be right. No matter what others say to the contrary, you must obey the voice of your own conscience. In all ages men have been picked out by God to be martyrs for right acting, and this lot has fallen to you. It is a hard one, but with your soul you cannot do otherwise than what you now want to do."

"Oh, daughter"—Merlin's head was now down on his arms, which rested on the fence—"I couldn't do without you; but you will suffer, too. If I do this thing everybody that I care for will be under the stigma of it. I love your ma an' Bob, an' this act may drive 'em from me. Listen, child, I was just thinkin' o' something powerful odd. Thar is a passage in our Saviour's teachin's that has always seemed to me to be absurd to come from such a

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great, sensible thinker, and that was the part, you may remember, whar he says something about folks havin' to give up father, mother, wife, an' child in order to follow 'im. That always seemed a misprint to me. I've heard infidels quote it to prove that our Lord was vain and stuck up, but don't you see how it applies to-night? Don't you see that I actually *do* have to leave your mother and Bob, in a certain sense, to do the thing that Jesus demands?"

"They won't leave you in the end, father," Anne said, consolingly. "At any rate, I want you to do this thing for Joe because you feel as you do about it. It ought to be done. It *must* be done."

Merlin raised his head. He grasped his daughter's hands; his eyes, filled with tears, gleamed in the starlight. "I'll attend to it in the mornin'," he said. "But, Anne, my daughter, I couldn't 'a' done it if you hadn't stood back of me. I was weak and waverin', but you decided me."

CHAPTER XIX

THE next morning about eleven o'clock Andrew came home from the Square. Anne was sweeping the veranda floor, and leaned on her broom, studying his face as he came in at the gate. He smiled as he drew from his pocket a legal document and brandished it playfully.

"It's settled—plumb settled!" he chuckled. "Child, you can't imagine the terrible opposition to a step like this. Two lawyers, one after the other, flatly refused to draw up the papers. I finally got it done by that young fellow, Cobb, that has just hung out his shingle, but the whole town is in an uproar over it. How is your ma acting?"

"She seems somewhat resigned to it now," Anne responded. "She was talking to Mrs. Preston at the fence just now, and Mrs. Preston said something about you that mother did not like. She came in raging with fury. She may criticize you herself, but she won't let any one else do it."

Andrew unfolded the sheet of legal-cap paper and scanned the text of it. "Do you want to go with me to Joe to tell 'im about it?" he asked. "He will be surprised and tickled powerfully."

"No, father; you go alone," Anne said. "You began it and you must put it through."

"Well, the sooner the better," was the reply. "I've got the money ready for his ticket and everything else is fixed. I think we'd better get him away before the excitement gets higher."

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He found Joe in the shade of an apple-tree behind the house. His leg had healed sufficiently for him to be able to walk about a little. He glanced up as his master approached. "I'm sorter gittin' de use er dis laig," he said, smiling. "I wants ter git ter wuk. I been layin' roun' long ernough. I wants ter git at dem trees en show you what I kin do. I learnt my lesson, dat day, Marse 'Drew. I won't hack myse'f any mo'—you see if I do."

"Keep your seat, Joe." The negro had risen respectfully. "The doctor tol' you not to throw your full weight on that leg for a while. I don't want to set down. I've got something to say to you. By the way, has that gal o' yours written to you lately?"

"Got er letter yistiddy, marster." He refused to sit and his swarthy face lighted up. "Delia say she's well en doin' well up dar. I was a little mite erfraid dat she might tek up wid some other nigger, but so far she hain't, en she say she don't 'ten' ter. She's lak me, I reckon. She say she thinks erbout me night en day, en I know I does erbout her. La me! Marse 'Drew, seem lak one half er me is yer, en t'er half away up dar amongst dem Yankees."

"How would you like to go to her, Joe?" Merlin asked, his eyes averted.

"Huh! I don't let my min' res' on dat, suh—no, siree! I did once fer er while when I thought maybe Marse Wilmot might let me hire out en buy my freedom wid my wages; but dat got me all stewed up, en when it fell thoo en he shifted me over ter you, I give up. No, suh, I don't cry over spilt milk. What's done, is done. I lef' it all in de hands er de gre't Marster on High. He know best. I wants Delia, en she wants me; but dar is er sight er things we want in dis life dat we ain't gwine ter git. No, suh, we ain't ergwine ter git um!"

"Joe, I have a surprise for you." Merlin was drawing the document from his pocket. "I've been to town this

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mornin' and had this paper drawed up and duly signed and witnessed to set you free. You are a free man, Joe, as free now as any white man in this great land of ours. I've got the money for your railroad ticket and you can go whenever you wish."

The negro raised his eyes; they became piercing, fixed, and almost bloodshot. His heavy lip hung down wet with saliva, and quivered. He suddenly leaned upon his lame leg, winced with pain, and recovered himself.

"Why, Marse 'Drew," he cried, "what you talkin' erbout? What got in yer, suh? Is you plumb los' yo' senses—is you—*is you*, I say?"

"No, I'm sane enough, Joe, I reckon." Merlin smiled and cleared his throat, his eyes gleaming with moisture. "I've fixed it all right. Here is the paper."

"Oh, Marse 'Drew, Marse 'Drew!" Joe stood on his sound leg, his body swaying back and forth. "I wonder kin dis be so. Las' night I dreamt I was free up dar wid Delia, en when I waked up en found I was in de same ol' rut I was ready ter die. But now you say—you say—Look here, white man, don't projec' wid me. I couldn't stan' dat. It's bad ernough ter dream er freedom en wake up in bondage ergin, widout bein' fooled over it."

"I'm not jokin', Joe," Merlin said, almost tenderly. "I'm glad to be able to do this thing for you. I don't deserve credit for it. It was a duty that was laid on me by a higher power."

"Well, well, well!" The ex-slave sank down in his chair, raised his hands to his face, and rubbed his eyes. "God bless, you—dat all I got ter say, 'ca'se I ain't able ter pay you. But listen ter me, Marse 'Drew, as de Lawd is lettin' me live en breathe, I'll pay you some day—I will, I will. Dis yer thing shall not cost you yo' good money in de long run. I'm er man now, suh; I feel it in my bones thoo en thoo, en de Lawd will he'p me. Here I was thinkin' you was low white trash, en hatin' ter belong ter you,

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'ca'se you wasn't high-up quality, en lo en behold, you is er angel er light! You showed de fus' streak er dat when you offered to tote me on yo' back fum de thicket ter my cabin, en now you cap it off wid dis big present. My Lawd! white man, I'm gwine ter pray ter God ter lay yo' enemies low in yo' track, en bring you out dis here 'sturbance into peace en glory, fer ever en ever."

CHAPTER XX

NO act in the history of Delbridge had ever created such wide-spread and adverse comment as the freeing of Joe. Absurd tales without the slightest foundation were afloat. The slaveholders were furious; the poor whites full of contempt. Why, many persons asked, should a citizen in straitened circumstances lose the value of a negro and pay his way to Boston unless it was meant as a deliberate insult to his own kind? It was said that Andrew was a spy transmitting information to Northern agitators who were opposed to the South. It was even declared that Joe was to be sent throughout the Northern States in his lamed condition as a political object-lesson of the cruelty of the whites. Some said that the story of the free negro girl was false and that Merlin actually intended to have Joe marry a white woman in accordance with his insane ideas of race equality.

There was one man in the county to whom the subject was seldom mentioned, and that was Thomas Merlin. He was seen very little away from his plantation. He had the sympathy of all classes; he seemed to have lost flesh, and his features had hardened under the disgrace his own blood had brought upon his name.

The Sunday following Joe's departure Andrew prepared for church, as was his habit. He blackened his coarse shoes with a mixture of molasses and soot which he had scraped into a pan from the back of the sitting-room fireplace, put on a ruffled shirt, a black necktie, and his broadcloth suit, and brushed his hat.

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Anne came to him in a white muslin dress and attractive straw hat.

"Mother and Bob won't go," she announced. "I was wondering, father, if you and I ought to go this first Sunday, anyway. You know how the people are talking."

He smiled and tossed his head defiantly. "Of course I know all that," he said, "an' I have given it due consideration. Once this mornin' I almost decided not to go till this racket sort o' blowed over, but then I got to thinkin' if I did quit to-day it would be harder to set in again. I haven't done nothin' I'm ashamed of, an' I'm not goin' to stay away from the house o' God on account o' doin' my duty as I see it. But you don't have to go. I can go by myself."

Anne bit her pretty lip as her fine eyes rested steadily on him. "I am going with you," she answered. "Folks shall not say that your own family have gone back on you, and they would say it—they will say anything in their present frame of mind."

"Well, I'm ready, if you are," he returned. "The fust bell rung just now, an' it will be preachin'-time when we git thar. I almost wish Parson Paxton would give place to some other preacher to-day; he is one man that forgits his cloth when he's on the slave subject. As a representative of the meek an' lowly Jesus, that I've always tried to follow, he is a plumb failure. I walked clean around the court-house t'other day to keep from meetin' him. I knowed he'd say somethin' to me, an' I didn't want to have to insult a man I'm payin' to tell me about God. I know this thing has made 'im mad, for all his kin owns plenty o' niggers down in the middle o' the State."

The second and last bell was ringing as Anne and her father went up the steps of the little steepled meeting-house on a side-street near the Square. The main floor was occupied by the benches for the white people, and over the front doorway was a narrow balcony set aside

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for the slaves. According to local custom, the men sat on the left-hand side of the room, and the women on the right; and as they entered Anne found a seat to herself half-way between the door and the pulpit. There was a bench immediately opposite on which two men sat. One was a lawyer, the other a planter, and as there was room for him on the end of the bench, Andrew sat there. He glanced at the two men, but they were not looking at him, and one bent to whisper something in the ear of the other. Just then a carriage emptied its contents at the steps, and Thomas Merlin and his wife, daughter, and two sons entered. For years they had used the same pew near the pulpit, and always sat together, that custom having descended from Thomas's late father-in-law, who had been a Virginian of autocratic habits. Glancing over his shoulder, Andrew caught his brother's eye, but Thomas made no sign of recognition as he rigidly stood aside for his family to enter the pew before him.

The minister, the Reverend Mr. Paxton, was a slender man of fifty, with a long, colorless face, iron-gray beard and hair, and a slipshod, bent-kneed movement when he walked. With his legs crossed, he now sat in one of the two high-backed, rosewood chairs which stood like sentinels on either side of the little white pulpit, on which rested a ponderous bible, a hymn-book, a pitcher of water, and a goblet. Andrew thought that there was something ominous to himself in the fact that Paxton descended the little flight of steps and advanced to Thomas with a hand cordially extended. He shook hands with the entire family and stood chatting in a low tone.

"He acts like he thought Tom had lost some member o' his family, an' needed consolation," Andrew mused, with an inclination to smile, but not giving in to it. "Maybe it's me that's dead in his estimation. By gum! I think I know what he's up to now! I ain't no fool, if I *do* have fits. He has got somethin' up his sleeve for me,

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an' he wants to show Tom at the start that he don't intend it as a family insult. Yes, I'll bet a purty that's it, an' I'm sorter sorry Anne come. I don't mind myse'f, but she's different—she takes things like that powerful hard."

Another family of local distinction was entering, and the minister turned, smiled, and bowed to them. They were the Prestons, father, son, mother, and daughter. The elder Preston was a tall man of fifty, with a military bearing. His wife was a short, plain-looking brunette, quite like her daughter Mary. Like his father, Arthur was dressed in the height of fashion. At a glance it could be seen that both of them were conscious of their birth and breeding. The elder Preston had been educated at West Point, and was looked up to as an authority on military questions, now more than ever, while rumors of war were afloat.

The minister returned to his seat and took up his notes for his sermon.

"I'll bet I'm in a hot-box to-day," Andrew thought. "Thar ain't one friendly face amongst 'em all. Well, I can't help it. I did what I thought was right."

If he had had the slightest doubt of the nature of the preacher's coming discourse it was dispelled in a moment after Mr. Paxton had risen, taken a preliminary sip of water from the cut-glass goblet, and opened the bible with his long, pale, dictatorial hands. For an instant his repellant eyes rested full on Andrew and his face waxed hard as he began, in a rasping voice, to read the story of the Pharisee and publican in the temple.

"Well," Andrew mused, "if he can twist *that* text around to fit his notion o' me he's a good one. He may do it; we'll wait an' see what he has to say."

Mr. Paxton was not long in showing the remote application he had made of the text to present-day problems. There were more than one or two kinds of Pharisees, he

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said. Modern life was producing innumerable varieties. Ignorant men in the bosom of the fair South, the fairest spot in the new Eden of America, were parading self-righteousness at home and abroad for ulterior motives. To enrich themselves in the world's goods, to hoodwink Northern capitalists, certain men living in the South were making a show of their silly and unwise ideas of freeing a race which the whole intellectual world knew was not made for any other station than that into which God had consigned it. No more cowardly or contemptible thing had ever occurred than had just happened in Delbridge. One single, uncouth, uneducated individual, seeing his opportunity to attract attention in the North and acquire a fortune by the sale of certain lands, had got possession of a slave for no other reason than exploiting him at the expense of the whole of his own people. Such a man should not be countenanced in any decent community. Such a man should not be received into any religious organization, for he was a breeder of evil and in league with Satan. Such a man should everywhere meet the hand of his neighbor raised against him. Envious of those superior to himself, who were able to own slaves and properly care for them, he was endeavoring to dethrone by a single wilful act an entire lawful system. His aim was to foster enmity between two sections up to now at peace. A certain novel, or so-called novel, unworthy even of mention as literature, was being read throughout the North, and was a lie from beginning to end. That trashy book was subtly stealing from the South its high reputation, and this one act of one stupid, venomous individual would add to the unfair furore raging throughout the North. "What is to be done about it?" Mr. Paxton shrieked. "You may well ask that question and look to the protection of your homes, for a man that will do the things I have mentioned before your eyes will do worse behind your back."

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At this moment there was, in the breathless stillness of the room, a sudden commotion. It was made by the movement of the feet of the two men seated by Andrew. Muttering something in angry tones, they had risen and were making their way past Andrew's rigid knees out into the aisle. But that they were not leaving the church was soon made plain, for they took seats on the bench immediately behind Merlin. The minister had paused and was watching the proceedings with a gleam of approval in his fierce blue eyes. There was a momentous silence. Andrew followed the men with a slow stare, and the meaning of their action dawned upon him. He acted quickly. With a hand clutching the back of the bench in front of him, he stood up.

"Excuse me, parson," he began, glancing down at the men who had moved, and who now sat glaring up at him. "If you don't mind, I'll get out 'fore you set in again. I'm afraid I'll empty your house, if I stay, and I don't want to disturb public worship."

"You certainly are excusable, sir," the minister retorted. "You have sown enough dissension amongst strangers without doing it here. The fact that two of your own townsmen refuse to sit on the bench you occupy ought to show you where you stand in the estimation of law-abiding people."

"I made a mistake in comin'," Andrew answered, a cold smile twisting his lips awry. "I could give you a text to preach on, parson, but you'd not be apt to go deep enough in it to dig out all its truth. Our Lord and Redeemer took some whip-cords once—he got so mad—and driv out of the temple a gang that was makin' money sellin' doves and the like, and I'll bet you, even with all his divine foresight, that he never dreamed that any temple built to his name would ever be used to encourage the buyin' and sellin' o' human bein's. He said, too, that it was the least and humblest of his creatures that he loved

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best, and I believe if he was here to-day facin' you all in your Sunday finery, as I am doin' now, that he'd call you 'whited sepulchers' or the soulless bones that lie in 'em. After a night o' prayer, when I didn't know what to do about that poor slave I owned, I thought I saw a streak o' light from above, and I followed it. Up to this minute I hain't ashamed or sorry for what I done, and I don't believe I ever will be. Good day to you one and all. I'll go out in the sunlight, under the clear sky, and do my worshipin', if I do any."

With those words, and glancing at Anne, who sat with her rigid face turned to his, he stalked from the church, his thick-soled shoes making a great clatter on the bare floor. He had scarcely reached the sidewalk when his daughter overtook him.

"Oh, you come, too!" he cried, with a low, awkward laugh.

"I thought I ought to," she said, faintly. "I could not have respected myself if I had stayed. Now he can say what he wishes. It won't matter."

"It was a lucky thing that your ma and Bob didn't come," he said, reflectively. "Me 'n' you can stand this sort o' tussle, Anne, better 'n they can. But they will have to be told the straight of it, and right off, too. Lies upon lies will be afloat before sundown. A knock-down-and-drag-out fight betwixt me and Paxton will be reported, with my shirt tore off my back by the lay members."

"Don't worry." Anne pressed his arm tenderly. "You did what you thought was right."

"And was rewarded for it by some'n' higher 'n this gang," Andrew put in, "don't forget that item. As long as I live I'll remember how Joe looked and talked when I told 'im he was free. This row to-day is a sort o' setback, but setbacks are a part o' every climb that takes a man upwards. Awful times are ahead of us, child. That feller to-day tried to make them folks think that I was

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fetching war on. But, la me! a bigger Being than I am is doing it, the same as he did when he surrounded corrupt cities of old. It may sound strange to you, but it is so. 'The Lord moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.' We are facing blood, sorrow, and carnage, but away off beyond the smoke o' battle and the stench o' rotting bodies the light is shining unobstructed. Now"—they had reached the gate of their home—"you go in and tell your mother. She will have to be told why we are home so early, anyway. She may rip and snort and even say things like Paxton did, or, then ag'in, she may side with me. She is in sympathy with Bob, though, and the boy is gettin' to be a rabid Reb. He wants to be like his cousins, and I can't blame him. He is what he is by the grace o' God. Right or wrong, he has his own row to hoe."

CHAPTER XXI

ANDREW paused on the veranda and took off his coat to cool himself after the walk in the sun, and Anne went into the sitting-room where her mother sat reading a weekly newspaper. "What has happened?" Mrs. Merlin inquired, suspiciously. "I know something has."

Anne stood removing her hat by a window. Calmly she recounted the whole thing.

"And they treated you that way?" burst from the angry lips of the attentive woman. "You shall never darken that door again. Are we the scabs of the earth because we don't want to keep a lazy nigger around? Wait till I meet that low-lived preacher. I'll tell him what I think of him. Hasn't your father helped feed and clothe him all these years? And to think a scamp like him would insult you—drive you away from church like that! It is fiendish, I tell you—and you just a young girl!"

Without any more ado Anne went up to her room. She heard her mother on the veranda talking to her father and Robert. She heard the boy's voice raised in angry tones, and a moment later saw him from her window as he went across the stable-yard and disappeared in the barn, where she knew he would be apt to sulk the remainder of the day. In a way she was sorry for her brother, for he had almost given up association with other boys on account of the disagreeable things which were constantly said in his presence about his father.

When Anne came down-stairs, half an hour later, she

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met her mother and father in the hall. "Arthur Preston is coming here, I think," Mrs. Merlin said. "He left the others at the gate and started this way. His mother and Mary were trying to stop him. I don't want to see him."

"I don't, either," Anne returned, tossing her head indignantly, her eyes flashing.

Anne turned into the parlor. She heard the latch of the gate click, and Arthur's steady stride as he came up the walk to the steps. In a moment he stood rapping timidly on the jamb of the open door. From her coign of vantage she could, unobserved, see his dwarfed shadow on the floor of the hall as he stood, his fashionable hat in hand. Several minutes passed; he was about to rap again when she went to him.

"I don't know if I am welcome, Anne," he began, in a manly, direct tone, "but after what happened at church this morning I simply had to come."

"I can't possibly see why," she answered, coldly, and she was well aware that she was doing an unusual thing in not at once asking him in, taking his hat, and offering him a seat.

"I see you are mad, but I hope you don't blame me," he said, unsteadily. "I was furious with Paxton when I saw you get up and leave. I—"

"But not when he was insulting my father," Anne interrupted, in a low, harsh voice. "That didn't stir you up, did it?"

Arthur dropped his eyes, colored, and stood hesitating. "Anne, you must understand that these are troublesome times," he falteringly began. "Men and women here in the South hardly know what they are saying when this great question comes up. But I want you to understand that never once have I let your father's views or acts influence me in regard to our friendship. You will always be the same sweet, brave girl to me that—"

"Stop!" she ordered, fiercely. "I don't want your

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friendship, Arthur Preston. I don't want any friendship that comes over that fence there. Your mother and sister think you have degraded yourself by calling here to-day, and I will not submit to it. The thing for you to do is to stick to *your* parents, and I'll stick to *mine*."

"Oh, Anne," he cried, aghast, "you don't mean that—you *can't* mean it! You know that I can't keep my people from seeing this matter as they do, and if they are offended by what your father has done and is doing, no power of mine can prevent it. As they see it—and I do, too—I'm honest about it, Anne—as they see it the well-being of the entire South is at stake. The slightest turn at Washington may hurl us into war to protect our own constitutional rights."

"I don't want to talk to you," Anne answered, coldly, pale to her set lips. "You may be sure I shall never accept the friendship of a man who sat and listened to a preacher for one second after he said what he did to my father this morning."

"You are wrong, Anne; you are wrong," Preston fairly pleaded. "I was tied hand and foot."

"I know you were, and that is why I despise you," Anne declared. "If such a thing had happened about *your* father in the presence of your sister would you have been tied hand and foot?"

Arthur swung his hat to and fro restlessly as he tried to catch her averted glance, his fine lips twitching helplessly. "Anne," he faltered, clearing his husky voice, "I see there is nothing that I can say now that will not anger you. Some day you will understand how I feel toward you better than you do now. I am between two fires. I have shown all along what I think of you, but your father's action has disappointed me, I'll admit. You think he has been badly treated to-day. You don't realize how the others think he has treated *them*. Rich men have freed slaves—some of my own kin in Virginia have done

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it, but they did it in a different spirit, and the effect on the public was not the same then as it would be now, during the present ferment of opinion. As others see it, your father is in active sympathy with the war views of the North, and—"

"Don't dare to criticize him to me!" Anne commanded. "You couldn't understand him in a million years, from your standpoint. I understand him, and that is enough for me. Your mother and sister are no doubt watching you through the fence. Don't let me have to ask you to leave."

"I'm going, Anne, and I am sorry—awfully sorry." He bowed humbly. "If this is the end of our friendship it is too bad. Good-by."

She turned away, and was in the sitting-room when the gate-latch clicked after he had passed through. Her father was standing at a window looking out on the grass.

"I heard part o' what you an' him said," Andrew began, eying her steadily and with gentle penetration, "an' it is a pity—a pity!"

"A pity?" she retorted, drawing herself more erect and facing him with an inquiring stare.

"Yes, a pity, an' a great pity at that. Do you know, child, that as far back as three years ago I saw you an' Arthur together at a Sunday-school picnic one day, an' I said then that nothin' would keep you two apart, an' now *I'm* doin' it—*me* an' nobody else. He is a fine young feller. I don't blame him for agreein' with his folks. As he sees it, he is right. He is manly enough not to hide anything, either. If you'd give 'im a chance just now he'd have ripped me up the back to your face. If war comes he'll go to the front, an' he will fight as long as a live hair is left on his head. He comes o' that sort o' stock. That is the pity of it. I had to do what I did for Joe, and Arthur will have to fight for his folks. He will lose his fight, in the long run, but that is neither here nor

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thar. He'll lose you, too, maybe, but that is neither here nor thar, either. They all say down here that I ought to keep my mouth shut and fall into line with them, but I can't. I thought about it once, but I got ashamed o' my weakness and took a final stand, and now they are kicking me about like a football. Your mother is terribly upset. She's back in the kitchen, trying to pacify Bob. He's heard about the row at church and is wild over it. Me and you are a funny pair, Anne." He laughed softly. "I don't think I could do what I'm doing all by myself. I'd wilt under it. You are a consolation and a help. If thar is such a thing as a man having a guardian angel in the flesh, you are that to me now."

CHAPTER XXII

ONE warm, sultry evening, shortly after this, Andrew went to the village express office, a small frame-house, near the railway station, and received a box which had been shipped to him from New York. It weighed more than fifty pounds, was a rather clumsy thing to carry, and yet he put it on his shoulder and bore it to the Square and into a drug-store which was kept by a man who was known to be in sympathy with the Union, but who seldom voiced his opinions. Few people were on the Square, and no one was in the store except the druggist, Doctor Castleton, who was in the room in the rear of the long, narrow building. He was seated at a table which was littered with bottles, labels, paste-pot, ink, pens, and writing-paper. On his knees was a tray holding the supper which had been sent to him from the hotel across the street. He finished and pushed the tray aside as Merlin came trudging ponderously in with his burden and eased it down in front of him. The doctor was a man past middle-age, full bearded, with a rather scrawny body. He smiled in greeting as he wiped his lips on a napkin.

"I know what's in that box," he said, tentatively.

"No, you don't, by a long shot," was Merlin's smiling reply. "Guess."

"Samples o' that marble you've sent off an' had polished. You want to display 'em in my window to catch suckers."

"No, Doc', you are off—away off." Merlin sat down on the box and folded his hands in his lap. "I'll tell you

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about this, Doc', an' I want you to pay attention to me an' not git scared out o' your socks before you hear all I got to say."

"Well, if it is politics, I'm goin' to go slow, 'Drew. I have to. I depend on these folks for a living. I disagree with 'em, but I can't throw dirt in their faces and expect them to keep on trading with me."

"I know all that," Merlin said, "but I don't think this thing will git you into trouble of any kind. Now I'm sorter in a hole, an' you kin help me out."

"I'm willing to do anything in reason," Castleton said. "What is it, 'Drew?"

"It is this-a-way, Doc'," Andrew began as he thrust his filbert-nailed fingers into his vest pocket for his piece of tobacco. "You know I've had to meet all sorts o' men up North in my marble dealin's, an' naturally a lot is said first and last about these big public questions, an' most of 'em up thar like to git my view because I'm down here amongst the folks that they all seem to think are to blame. Well, thar is one feller that was in the company I had formed, an' he was always more anxious to talk about the nigger question than he was about makin' money out o' my deal. He seems to have plenty o' means, anyway, his folks bein' rich. Well, when we'd all git together he'd always lead out with somethin' he'd heard or read about the dispute between the two sections, and we'd all have trouble to shut 'im off. Still I liked 'im, and we was good friends. He'd indorse for me at a bank at the drop of a hat, and often lent me small amounts to run on. Sometimes he'd be astonished when I'd pay 'im back, for he'd plumb forgot about it. Well, one day just before I left he was talkin' about that novel we've all heard so much against in the pulpits and newspapers."

"*Uncle Tom's Cabin*," Castleton put in.

"That's it—you've hit it. Well, he was surprised when I told him I thought the woman that wrote it didn't

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know her subject clean down to the ground. I told 'im that Shakespeare, Saint Paul, nor nobody else could just stop over at a winter resort down here and write up the South in a thorough way. I told 'im that I'd heard it was a slobberin' tale full o' bloodhounds chasin' runaway niggers through the woods, and big, strapping overseers cuttin' the backs of slaves to the bone, and that I didn't care to read a yarn that was more like a nightmare than anything else. Well, me and him had it up and down, and I thought that was the end o' our argument, but it wasn't."

"You say it wasn't?" Castleton put the tray containing the remains of his supper down on the floor and pushed it under the table with his foot.

"No, and this box is the outcome. I got a letter from 'im t'other day. He writ me that he was spendin' money buyin' the book at wholesale, and was sendin' 'em, free o' charge, in all directions as a sort o' campaign document, an' beggin' folks to read 'em for their enlightenment. He said he knowed the slaveholdin' class wouldn't open it, but as he'd heard me speak of the few straggling Union men in this section, he wanted me to distribute the books amongst 'em with his good-will an' compliments. As he put it, he wanted to send 'em some little keepsake or memento from a heartfelt sympathizer away up thar. He says thar are forty copies in this box, an' he hopes I'll hand 'em to the right parties."

"I see, I see," Doctor Castleton said.

"Well, I don't know whether you do or not," Merlin went on. "You don't see my plight, anyway. Now I don't care for this dang made-up tale nohow, but still the feller's gone an' put his money in the books an' throwed me on my honor to he'p 'im git shet of 'em. I'd ship 'em back to him, but he'd git mad, an' I want to keep him as a friend. I've got a fair chance o' gittin' that company together again, when this turmoil is over, an' I don't want to antagonize any of 'em."

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"I don't see that you are in any particular trouble over it," Castleton remarked. "You have only to give the books to Union men, you say."

"That's all, an' I want to begin with you; you'll have to accept a book, Doc', an' I was wonderin'" —Andrew hesitated—"I was wonderin', you see, Doc', if I could store 'em here with you."

"I'm willing. I don't see any harm in it," Castleton answered.

"Well, all right then," Andrew breathed in relief. "I'll leave 'em here, an' when I meet a Union man that can read an' wants to see the book I'll send him to you on the quiet."

"Well, see that it *is* on the quiet," the druggist warned him. "You are a very unpopular man, 'Drew. You are not afraid to express your views and the whole county is up against you."

"I know it, an' I'll try to be cautious," Merlin answered. "Whar'll I put the box? It is time I was at home. My folks are constantly on the lookout for me to be rid on a rail, in a suit o' tar an' feathers, if not strung up by the neck."

"Leave it there; I'll put it away," Castleton said. A customer was at the front, and he went to him.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE morning a springless road-wagon, in which an elderly man and woman sat in unpainted, white-oak chairs, stopped at Merlin's gate. The woman was a little, bent creature, her husband a tall, straight, sinewy man, of rugged outdoor appearance. They were Peter Staples and his wife Jane, Mrs. Merlin's father and mother. They lived in an adjoining county beyond the mountain range in the west and seldom visited Delbridge. Mrs. Staples lowered her chair to the ground, and, aided by her husband, stepped into it and thence to the sidewalk. Peter descended also, but took his stand at the horses' heads and, nodding toward the house, he said:

"You go on in; I'll wait here till you see how ever'-thing is."

Without a word of response, the little woman opened the gate with the scrawny fingers of a hand in a home-made cotton mitt, and went up the veranda steps and in at the open door. She wore a gingham sunbonnet, and did not remove it. In the sitting-room she saw Anne sewing at a window.

"Oh, it's grandma!" the girl cried out loud enough for her mother, who was in the dining-room, to hear, and Anne dropped the sheet she was hemming and stood up, her hand extended in greeting. "Let me have your bonnet," she said. "Take the rocking-chair. We had no idea you were coming."

Ignoring the outstretched hand, the old woman stood

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looking about the room through the narrow opening of her bonnet. "Whar's your ma?" she asked, coldly.

"Here I am, mother!" Ruth called out from the other room. "I'm coming." And entering, Mrs. Merlin started to kiss the partly hidden face, only to have it disappear completely under the quickly down-tilted bonnet.

"Whar's 'Drew—whar's that man o' yourn?" the sharp, piping voice of the visitor demanded.

"I think he's out at the barn," Mrs. Merlin answered, in some chagrin. "Do you want to see him right off?"

"I don't want to see him *at all*—that's why I axed. If he was to come in at that door at this minute, I'd walk straight out. It's you that we've come to see. Your pa is outside, holdin' the hosses. He don't intend even to unhitch. He says he won't darken your door till he knows whar you stand on this nigger question that your man has gone crazy about."

"Oh, I see." Ruth bridled stiffly. "So you and father have taken that up, have you?"

"What else was thar to do, I want to know?" was shot from the quivering bonnet. "Nothin' else ain't talked of over our way except the outlandish conduct o' 'Drew Merlin an' the stuck-up nigger he freed. Folks sniff and turn up their noses at us, as if we was blood kin to the feller you married, an' that's exactly what we come for. Me 'n' yore pa wants to know if you intend to stay on with 'im."

"Stay on with him?" Anne broke in, warmly. "Grandma, is it possible that—"

"Hold yore tongue, you young snip of a fool!" retorted Mrs. Staples. "Everybody knows whar *you* stan'. Folks say you strutted out o' the meetin'-house t'other day like a queen when the preacher was just tellin' the plain truth about the Yankee-lovin' scoundrel that fetched you into the world."

Anne, red with fury, was about to reply when she was

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stopped by her bewildered mother. "Don't say anything," Ruth urged, and then she turned to the visitor. "Sit down and take off your bonnet, ma. You are excited. You needn't think I am not in as great trouble as you are. I don't agree with 'Drew, but you yourself advised me to marry him, and now that he and I have children—"

"You are no child o' ourn if you keep on with 'Drew Merlin!" threw back the offended woman. "Yore pa's said so, and I am with 'im. No daughter o' ourn shall live with a nigger-lovin' idiot o' that stripe."

For once in her life Ruth was angry. "You mustn't talk like that to me," she blurted out, "here before my child and his. He may not be absolutely right, but he is not as bad as you try to make him out."

"Then you intend to stay on with him?" said Mrs. Staples, fiercely, pushing back her bonnet and disclosing a pale, deeply-wrinkled visage full of malignant shadows.

Ruth tossed her head, and her firm twisting lips half smiled. "Yes, I intend to remain with him. I can't have you coming here talking like this. I'll go out and speak to father. If he is as hard-hearted and hasty as you are, we may as well part and be done with it."

"I'm goin'," said the little fury. "He'll tell you what I've told you, an' that settles it. You are no daughter of ourn."

The old man at the wagon stared frigidly at his daughter as she came through the gate, followed by her mother. His slouch-hat was pushed well back on his head and his blue eyes gleamed ominously.

"Father," Ruth began, without offering to kiss him or even shake hands, "mother says—"

"I tol' her," broke in the voice from the bonnet, "exactly what me 'n' you agreed on, an' both her an' Anne flared up an' just as good as tol' me to min' my own business or leave the place."

"Father," Ruth was half angry, half pleading, "I am

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sure you are willing to be reasonable. You can't expect me to desert my husband for—"

"When men are ready to draw arms ag'in' one another," Peter Staples began, in the tone and with the dignity that would have been becoming to some great, crude leader of men in a public forum, "thar is no time to think of love betwixt parent an' child. I'm tooth, nail, brain, an' soul ag'in' the venomous snake that has begun to spit his p'ison in the faces of his lifelong friends. 'Drew Merlin hain't got the brain of a louse on a pig's back. I'm ashamed to be the granddaddy of his children. Me 'n' yore ma's goin' back home. We hain't denounced you out thar yet, for we didn't know what stan' you'd take, but we will from now on. Git in, Jane. I seed the dirty scamp peep around the corner o' the house jest now, an' slink back like the coward he is. Me 'n' him will hitch if we meet face to face. The war is comin', but I don't want to be the fust to draw blood."

"I don't care what you do." Ruth's temper was inherited from two sides of her family. "I shall act as I see fit. You are both unreasonable—you always were. If you would stop to think you'd know that I can't do what you ask, with two children on my hands, and—"

"Then good day to you." Peter was climbing after his wife into the wagon. "You'll see the day you'll wish you'd listened to us. I predict that it won't be long before the white-livered skunk you bed with will be dragged out by the heels and properly attended to by his neighbors. We handle his sort quick over our way."

Peter lashed his unoffending horses and the wagon rolled away. Anne, at an open window, had heard the talk, and turned to her mother as she came in.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked.

"Don't talk to me!" Ruth was becoming hysterical as the aftermath of her anger. "I don't know what's to become of us," she sobbed. "Has your father—has *any*

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man a right to do and say things that go against his family at such a time as this? What do I care about the lazy, dirty niggers? They are happy—singing songs and dancing jigs, while we are miserable enough to kill ourselves. If they are like that in slavery, why should we become outcasts among our own kind to help change matters?"

There was nothing to say to this, and Anne left her weeping mother and slipped out through the kitchen to the barn. She saw her father in a corner of the zigzag rail fence, whittling a splinter into a toothpick, which he thrust between his brown-stained teeth more from a habit than a necessity, and went to him.

"I seed 'em drive up and away ag'in." He was staring in a mirthless way at his anxious daughter. "I know what took place as well as if I'd been on hand. I started round to speak to your grandpa, but one look at 'im was enough. Me 'n' him's had many a sharp tilt. How did your ma take it?"

"She was mad at first, but now she is crying," Anne explained.

"Poor thing! I thought she'd act that way. She's for me when I'm pounced on, but ag'in' me at other times. Looks like the only way to hold her regard is to be an under dog in a fight all the time. Say, child, I want to make a prophecy—mark it down and see if it don't hit. This strife I'm in may go on and get so bad that your ma will finally give up and plumb throw me over. I'm not sure, but I feel like that is to be the end o' our purty courtin'-time that begun away back in our young days. And what's all this wrangle about? I hardly know, except that my conscience tells me to do certain things that other folks think are awful. I say other folks, but *you* don't, Anne. *You* stand by me; and let me tell you some'n'. Do you know that real, lasting love betwixt a man and his wife ought to be based on an understanding and faith

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like you have in me—and like I have in you, too? Lawsy me! wouldn't that be sweet? A feller would go through fire and water to support a just cause if he was backed every step by the one woman o' his choice. I've got a heap to contend with, but right now your mother is a bigger drag on me than all the rest put together. Let's go in to her. Poor thing, she is to be pitied, and if I ever crawfish in these things it will be on her account!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE Union men who, following Andrew's direction, went to Castleton's drug-store and secured copies of the novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, were not discreet. Some of them thoughtlessly exhibited the books, or left them lying around where the opposing faction ran across them, and it was only a short time before the public was in a tempestuous rage against both Andrew and Doctor Castleton. A public meeting was held one night at the school-house. Inflammatory speeches were made by leading farmers, merchants, and lawyers. The crowd gathered and became more and more boisterous and vindictive. The upshot of it might have been expected. A mob was formed. It surged sullenly through the streets to the drug-store and demanded the remaining copies of the book from the frightened, apologetic Castleton. They were at once produced, taken to an open space in the Square, and in a heap of empty barrels and boxes were duly fired. The flames leaped high. The church bells, the only means of giving alarm, were rung. Shouts and screams rent the air. Then another thing took place; an old suit of clothes was found, brought to the light, and stuffed with sawdust and shavings. A bundle of rags representing a human head in an old straw hat was fastened on to the shoulders of the figure, and the whole was labeled with the name of Andrew Merlin on a cardboard with a brush from a marking-pot containing a mixture of lampblack and oil. The figure was fastened to a pole and a fire was built around it. Andrew was burnt in effigy, and no greater disgrace, in

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the estimation of his neighbors, could have befallen him. They said—even the most conservative—that the rebuke was deserved; the more rabid hinted that it was only the forerunner of worse to come to the man who was such a festering menace to the community at large.

That evening Andrew and his family were seated on the veranda of his home, and the first notification they had of the affair was the ringing of the bells and the flare of the flames at the Square.

"Some house on fire," Andrew said, calmly. "Maybe some store or office."

Robert, boy-like, did not ask permission to leave, but shot away at the top of his speed. Mrs. Merlin showed little interest, and remained seated, but Anne and her father went to the street corner beyond the Preston place and stood waiting to find out from some passer-by where the fire was. The prolonged shouting was easily heard.

"Sounds sort o' funny to me," Andrew remarked. "Seems like the crowd is havin' fun over some'n' or other. Thar can't be serious danger to property or they wouldn't carry on like that."

"I thought I heard your name called out," Anne said, in a tense voice. "There, I heard it again. Didn't you?"

"Surely you must be mistaken—" Andrew began, but fell silent and stood staring, his grim features lighted up by the distant flames. "I wonder—I wonder," he muttered, "if they have got on to them books I left down thar?"

"What house is it?" The inquiry was from Mrs. Merlin, who now came up to them.

"I can't quite make out," her husband answered, from the disturbed depths of himself. "The flames seem to be a little mite lower. If—if it *is* a house, they are gittin' it under control."

"It isn't a house," Anne said, in a troubled voice, close

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to his shoulder. "Father, it is those books—that and nothing else. I have been afraid of it all along."

"What books are you talking about?" Mrs. Merlin asked, plaintively.

Anne lamely explained, while her mother stood staring helplessly.

"What next?" Mrs. Merlin gasped. "In the name of all possessed, what will you do next?"

At this moment all doubts as to the cause of the commotion were removed by the approach of Doctor Castleton, who suddenly emerged from the shadows of the trees which bordered the street.

"I started to your house, 'Drew," he began, panting and out of breath. "They got on to them books, and I thought I ought to warn you. They seem to blame you more than they do me, and they handled *me* rough enough, the Lord knows! It is a wonder they didn't fire my store. Once I thought they would tear me limb from limb."

"How do you mean, warn me?" Andrew asked, doggedly.

"Why, there is no telling what they may take a notion to do, in their present frame of mind. They are as wild as Indians on the war-path."

"They burned the books, then?" Andrew said.

"Yes, and I want to be straight with you, 'Drew," Castleton went on, resignedly. "I've agreed not to make any more trouble. I had to. As it is, my business may be ruined already."

"I'm sorry I got you in it," Merlin sighed. "I wouldn't 'a' taken the books thar if I'd thought it would raise such a rumpus."

"I'm going home now," Castleton went on. "I thought I'd let you know how the land lies. It would be just like 'em, after they are through down there, to march on to your house. If I was you, 'Drew, I'd get the women folks away, for to-night anyway."

"There is a gun loaded with buckshot at home!" sud-

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denly burst from Ruth. "If they dare to enter our gate, I'll use it myself, if nobody else does."

On another occasion Castleton might have been amused by the remark, but he treated it seriously now. "I wouldn't do that, Mrs. Merlin," he gravely advised. "A mob is a ticklish bunch of people and has to be dealt with wisely. We ought to pacify men in the mood these fellows are in. They think their rights have been stepped on."

Some one else was approaching, and Castleton turned away. The person scurrying along, his head down, was Robert. In the darkness his mother was the only one who recognized his shambling gait.

"Bob!" she called out, and the boy paused and stood staring. "Wait for me, darling."

Robert seemed to waver a moment, then reluctantly slouched toward them.

"Do you know what they are doing down there?" his shrill young voice cracking in his tight throat. He stood staring at his father, his lips parted, his long, unkempt hair falling before his eyes.

"Castleton told us," Merlin replied. "Never you mind. Go home and go to bed."

"Huh! as if that 'u'd wipe it out!" Robert's voice broke and he finished in a whimper. "Do you know what they did to me? Some big boys, and even grown men, caught hold of me and dragged me close up to where they had you on a pole, held me there, and made me see it burn to ashes. They did that to *me*, as if *I* had put the dirty books there to insult them."

He was crying now. His father flared up in anger that was too shallow to flow freely—too futile to burn long. He started to speak, but checked himself, and stood cowed, thwarted, stricken to the core of his paternal being. Robert, moreover, had something else to say, and he steadied his voice to say it, leaning closer to his father and staring into his face:

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"A man from the mountains, a feller with a big pistol, proposed to them all to come up here and drag you out of the house and whip you."

"He did, did he?" Andrew said, grimly. "Well, are they comin'?"

"They all whooped and yelled and started," Robert answered, "but Arthur Preston jumped up on a box, made a speech, and checked 'em. He told 'em that his mother was mighty sick, and that the noise so close would be bad for her—might even kill her."

"But she's *not* sick," Ruth Merlin put in. "I saw her in the yard late this evening, walking about hale and hearty."

"He got down then—Arthur got down and made 'em let me loose," Robert went on. "He hit one fellow in the jaw who kept holding to my collar, and when Arthur got me free he took me through the mob and told me to go home. I'll never forget that act. He is a better friend to me than my own—"

"Don't say it!" Andrew jerked out. "If you do it, I'll—"

Merlin's indecision swamped his utterance, and here the action of his wife spoke louder than any words of hers could have done. She put her arms about her son, drew his shaggy head to her breast, and stroked his distraught face. "Let's go home, darling," she all but cooed. "They won't come to-night, anyway. What ails your wrist?" examining it tenderly, significantly.

"They scraped the skin off jerking me about," the boy said. "The trouble with me is I don't know what to do. I have to take their abuse. How can I fight 'em when I know they are right about it? Some day I'll leave home—I won't stay here like this. I won't—I won't!"

With this, Robert, sobbing without restraint, plunged away and his mother hastily followed. Anne and her father lingered on the street corner. They watched the

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pair as they disappeared in the darkness arm in arm, and heard Ruth's would-be consoling voice.

"It is about out now." Andrew was speaking of the flames in the Square. His tortured eyes shifted to the grave face of his daughter. "Child, they have burned your daddy to a crisp to-night. The Good Book says the way of the transgressor is hard. I wonder if I'm a transgressor. Who knows, maybe I am."

"You are right in all you do," Anne murmured softly. "Don't worry. God will help you."

"Do you think so?" Andrew turned homeward. "I don't know. Sometimes I'm all at sea, and on a dark, stormy one at that. I know one thing. I don't do harm intentionally. To begin with, I didn't take Joe of my own free will. He was forced on me. Then I had to set 'im free—that was forced on me, too. I can't regret it, either, for letters from him and his wife show that they are doing well. Then, finally, as for these very books, they was sort o' pushed on me. I never would have left 'em with Castleton if that Northern chap hadn't put his money in 'em, an' begged me to hand 'em out. Well, I don't care for myself—I don't count in this shuffle—but I *do* care about your ma an' Bob an' you. One part o' me to-night feels like bowin' down before these hot-headed folks an' agreein' to be with 'em heart, soul, an' body; but on t'other hand the other part says, 'No, no, no!' It says, 'No,' child, just as loud, just as firm, an' I don't know but what, on the whole, it says it even a little bit louder an' firmer."

CHAPTER XXV

THE storm-clouds rising in the North and in the South were meeting and clashing. Their rumblings were heard even across the Atlantic and echoed.

Thomas Merlin was using his pen in the papers, and his tongue in constant stump-speaking. He was one of the delegates to the convention which met at Montgomery, Alabama, and had frequent consultations with Joe Brown, Governor of Georgia.

Around Delbridge, all through the mountains, a new sort of activity was rife. Work in the fields and the forests was neglected. Crude, ill-formed companies, and regiments of men in homespun clothing, carrying old-fashioned squirrel-rifles, double-barreled shot-guns, and newly invented pikes, marched through the streets and along the country roads. Churches and school-houses were used as temporary barracks. Tents too thin to shed an April shower dotted the swards about the court-houses. Men too old for service and boys too young were bubbling over with the spirit of fresh, indignant adventure. Most of them were born for the saddle and the chase. Deer and bear were becoming extinct in the mountains; the Indians had moved away; here was a new thing to kill—a beast of invasion that dared to dictate the changes to be made in their laws.

Thomas Merlin returned from the clamorous convention. He was fired by a new ambition. A close friend of Capt. Carter Preston, he received from that gentleman hasty instructions in tactics, was pronounced capable

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enough, considering the dearth of military officers, and set about forming a company of mountain volunteers under his leadership. He made the announcement through the local papers and by printed handbills nailed upon the trunks of trees and distributed broadcast through the country.

Martin Dill brought one of the circulars to Andrew one day as he sat under an apple-tree in his backyard. Andrew read it closely, his lips mutely moving, after a habit of his as his fixed eyes met and took in the words.

"Red-hot, ain't it?" he smiled up at his friend. "I didn't know Tom could feel so strong even on this subject. By gum! it sort o' sends a shiver down my own spine. Some of it sounds like a speech by Patrick Henry or Alec Stephens. That line thar"—indicating it with a steady, black-edged finger-nail—"bout him feelin' called on to do double service in family defense, is a plain dig at me. Well, I didn't expect anything else. He hain't spoke to me since our last tilt. He said then he never would again, an' I reckon he'll keep his word."

"Yes, he's rabid ag'in' you," Dill admitted, with the blunt candor of his class. "They say he never lets a chance go by to disown you. He even gives it to me for bein' friendly with you. Well, what are me 'n' you goin' to do? My wife is as crazy as a roach without a crack to run into. You see, they are makin' it hot for me 'n' her out our way. They have fetched around the enlistment lists half a dozen times, an' each time they are more insultin'. A gang o' bushwhackers, out for any sort o' devilment, passed our cabin last night an' yelled out insults and even throwed rocks. The rocks peppered over the roof an' made a terrible clatter on the boards. For a while we thought it was all up with us. Men o' that stripe, 'Drew, don't care a tinker's damn what they do to fellers like me, an' you, too, for that matter."

"I don't hardly know what step I will take yet."

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Andrew handed back the circular, took out his tobacco, offered it to Dill, who unceremoniously bit into it and returned it. "You see, Mart, it is gettin' harder an' harder every day. I don't go outside o' the yard now, because I want to avoid trouble if I can, when folks are all stirred up as these are. I send Anne to the store for anything we need. So far they hain't insulted her, but they may any day, an' if they did—if they did—well, I kin take some things, but I couldn't hold in then."

"I see, I see," Dill returned, "an' I don't blame you, 'Drew. A man that 'u'd treat a sweet, pretty trick like Anne bad would have to be handled, an' right off, war or no war. Mandy is in the house with your wife. I left 'em thar chattin'. We come in to talk it all over with you, 'Drew. Hanged if I know whar we are goin' to buy what we need to live on. You know Hank Flynn keeps the only store nigh us, an' he shut the door smack in my face when I went to buy some coffee t'other day—said no money o' mine should ever taint his cash-drawer."

"It's every bit as bad as that here in town," Andrew answered, reflectively.

"I don't doubt it," Dill returned, embarrassed by what he had come to say in particular, "but, 'Drew, I'm goin' to tell you the whole truth. Me 'n' Mandy feel powerful lonely out our way. You see, thar hain't another Union family in five miles o' us, an' me 'n' Mandy got to talkin', an' we agreed that thar 'u'd be no harm done if we axed a favor of you."

"Favor? Spit it out," Andrew answered. "Lord! I'd do anything in my reach for folks like you an' Mandy in such times as these."

"Well, as I said, we are powerful lonely, an' we thought that maybe you'd not object to have us come an' occupy the little house Joe used while he was here."

"Huh! I wouldn't let you stay thar!" Andrew cried; "but I'll tell you what we will do. We've got a big,

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empty room up-stairs, an' if you will fetch in your beddin' an' such like, you may keep the room as long as you wish. Hanged if I don't like the idea o' havin' Union folks about, anyway. If I have to ride on a rail, wear a tar-an'-feather uniform, or swing from the limb of a tree, it would be a comfort to have a good-lookin' feller like you alongside o' me."

"Mandy will be powerful glad." Dill had failed to catch the humor in his friend's droll phrasing. "How is your wife takin' it now, 'Drew? You know you said awhile back that she was upset."

"I don't know whar to put her yet, Mart." Merlin was all seriousness now. "At times she is with me tooth and nail, and then ag'in she seems to get sulky and dreamy, like she's thinking of something away off some'r's. I reckon she bothers some over losin' her mammy and daddy, for they've cut us off for good. Her and Anne are gettin' wider apart every day, and then thar's Bob."

"Oh yes, the boy," Dill said. "I always thought he was odd, for a young lad. He turned his back slap-dab on me as I come in the gate just now. I seed 'im at the Square t'other day, too. He was watchin' your brother drill his company. You know Tom's oldest boy, George—too young to sprout fuzz on his lip—has enlisted, and looked fine in his new uniform. Bob was watchin' his uncle manoeuver his men as he strutted in front of 'em with the sword folks say Governor Brown presented to 'im. Looked to me like Bob wanted to see it all an' yit not be caught watchin'. I've seed boys look dissatisfied, but your boy looked more so than any feller I've seed for many a day. Surely he don't want to j'ine the Rebs, does he?"

"It wouldn't surprise me if he did *want* to," Andrew returned. "The truth is, Tom wouldn't take 'im in his ranks, young as he is, even to spite me, and Captain Preston don't want 'im. I must say the boy is a puzzle

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to me, Mart. I love 'im as much as I do Anne. I always think of him as the little pink-skinned feller in his red linsey frock that I used to tote about—first in my arms, and later when he'd ride on my back—or show off before company with his cute ways and talk. But now thar are times when I feel like I am arguing with a full-grown man, especially when we talk on these subjects. An' le'me tell you some'n', Mart—I'm talkin' plain to-day, you see, Mart—if I ever plumb lose my wife—I say *if* I ever lose 'er completely it will be on account o' that boy. From the start Anne seemed to drift to my knee an' Bob to his mother's arms. It ain't the way to fetch up a boy an' girl, but we did it, an' now we are facin' the consequences. We've got a house that is divided against itse'f, an' it may fall. I'm all in a stew, Mart. When you move in, I'll tell you more about it."

The next day the Dills came into town in an old road-wagon loaded down with their household effects. Robert and Anne were on the veranda when they got out and began to bring their things in and bear them up the stairs to the vacant room. Anne turned to help, but with a sneer of contempt the boy walked to the side of the yard and stood looking toward the Square. There was a sound of a drum clumsily beaten, and a bugle splutteringly blown in the distance.

"It is Captain Preston an' Captain Merlin's men joined together for a big parade," Mrs. Dill explained to Anne, grandiloquently. "They are looking for their new uniforms to-morrow for both companies, an' are fixin' for a big encampment in the edge o' town whar they will be quartered till orders come for 'em to leave. Folks say that Arthur Preston wants to go, but his daddy won't let 'im yet awhile. He says one from his family is enough, an' somebody has to stay at home to manage the plantation an' keep the niggers in bounds."

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Anne said nothing. She took up some big feather pillows and bore them up the stairs. Descending presently, she went to her brother, who stood at the fence, his chin on the top of the palings.

"Why don't you come help us?" she asked. "Do you think it looks right for you to stand here like this while we are at work?"

His young, bloodless face was almost saturnine in expression. "Help them?" he muttered, fiercely, his eyes coldly flashing. "Help move clodhoppers like them into our house to make people laugh all the more at us? Who do you think sensible people respect and look up to—our father with trash like them around, or his brother down there at the head of a lot of brave men? I don't have to believe like father does, and I won't. He has disgraced you and me and mother and the very name he bears."

"You ought to be ashamed," Anne said, helpless under his tirade. "Now is the time you ought to stand by your father as—as Arthur Preston is standing by his, as George is standing by uncle."

"Stand by nothing!" Robert retorted. "If Preston and Uncle Tom lived up among the Yankees and took up for the South their sons would have a different song to sing. As it is we are the scum of this town. Even the niggers are more respected. Do you know what a man said to me the other day? He was too big for me to fight, even if I'd tried it—he said that he had heard that father expects you to marry a nigger."

"You oughtn't to pay attention to anything as absurd as that is." Anne shuddered and flushed. "They will say anything at such times as these. They don't understand father, and you do not, either. He is in great trouble, and you are adding to it by your surly, pouting ways."

The sound of fifes and drums was heard from the direction of the Square, and, oblivious of his sister's call to

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him to stay, Robert passed through the gate and hastened down the street.

Turning, Anne met her mother. "Where did Bob go?" Mrs. Merlin inquired, anxiously. "He is acting strangely. At times he seems almost dazed and out of his mind."

"I think he went down to see the parade, mother. Don't worry about him."

"How can I help it?" Mrs. Merlin sighed. "The poor boy is suffering agony. He rolls and tosses, and talks in his sleep about guns and soldiers, war an' bloodshed. Mrs. Dill is good company in spite of her views. I'm glad she came."

CHAPTER XXVI

TWO days later, in the afternoon, an old gray-headed, gray-bearded man rode up to Andrew's gate on a flea-bitten white mare, stiffly dismounted, fastened his bridle to the fence, and entered the yard. Andrew saw him through the open door, and turned to Anne and Mrs. Dill, who were mending the band of a spinning-wheel in the sitting-room.

"It is old Jimmy Webb," he said. "I owe him a little interest money. I reckon he is like the rest o' us and needs it. Well, I can't pay it to-day. I'll tell you some'n' in advance. You folks needn't get scared at his talk. He has a peppery temper. He's none too well, anyway, and the war has upset 'im. Don't run off; stay on and 'tend to your work."

"Huh! I know 'im from the ground up," Mrs. Dill informed Anne, with a laugh. "He don't like me a bit."

Andrew went to the door to meet the visitor. "Come in, come in, Jimmy," he called out, cheerfully. "I was sort o' looking for you. It was my place to go to you with that money, but—"

"I'm not after money." The old farmer had on a broad-brimmed soft hat, and he drew it off and crushed it in his thin, nervous hands. "I come about some'n' else, an' "—looking at Mrs. Dill, to whom he had barely nodded, he added, peevishly, "it is private."

"Me 'n' Anne won't stan' in your way, Mr. Webb," Mrs. Dill said, sarcastically, as she got up, shaking her skirts vigorously. "We was fixin' this wheel; it is a little

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bit heavy, but we can tote it out to the woodshed, if we are botherin' you."

"You couldn't bother me by anything you'd do or say, woman," Webb snorted, his eyes flashing. "Old as I am, I can whip ten such men as the scamp you married. I know all I want to know about you an' him."

Anne, fully alarmed, was leaving the room when, with a low, significant laugh, Mrs. Dill caught her skirt and stopped her. "Wait, I'm with you. Don't leave me with this old 'possum; a animal like him is rantankerous when his tail is fastened in a split stick an' he is toted about with his head down."

"Send your *man* to me, that's all I can ask," Webb blustered, impotently. "I didn't come to see you, an' I can leave without 'tendin' to what I come for, if 'Drew Merlin wants you to block my way."

"Oh, tut, tut, tut!" Andrew gave a gentle laugh. "They are goin' out."

"Of course we are goin' out," Mrs. Dill retorted, as she followed Anne from the room. "If I was under my own roof you'd not be axed to take a seat. I'd burn sulphur under your chair after you left, if you did."

"She's like a cat," Andrew said, amicably; "if you rub the fur the wrong way sparks will fly."

"What's she doin' here?" Webb demanded, as he tremblingly caught the back of a chair and eased his stiff body down. "I saw Dill out at the wood-pile as I lit from my mare."

Andrew explained, lamely, for he was conscious of the anger his words would stir up.

"Huh! I see, I see!" snorted the farmer, dropping his hat on the floor with a furious gesture. "That's what made the mountain men decide to act. Uh-huh! I see now—it's plumb clear. You had already gone the limit, an' this capped it off."

"I don't know what you are talkin' about, Jimmy,"

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Andrew said, his brow corrugated in perplexity. "As to the interest money, it is this way—"

"I didn't come to talk about *that!*" snapped the old man. "If you paid it I wouldn't know what to do with it. What bank is safe these days? You can wait till the war is over, if these furious mountain folks let you live that long. No, it wasn't money, but I'll tell you one thing. I ain't in no good humor with you to-day, 'Drew Merlin. I've got my rights, an' my rights are to be true to my principles. My son is in Preston's company, boilin' over an' itchin' fer the blood o' your sort. He may git shot among the first. I would go, you kin bet your boots, if they'd take me, but they won't. Preston laughed at me just now when I offered to enlist."

"You'll have to git down to rock-bottom if you want to make your meanin' clear, Jimmy. You spoke about your rights."

"Yes, my *rights!*" cried Webb. "What other man in this community, even your own brother, is lyin' awake like I did last night, rollin' an' tossin', undecided what step to take in regard to you? I prayed; by God! I got down on my knees, stiff as I am, an' in sharp, keen pain at that, an' begged the Lord to lead me. One minute I was as mad as all hell at you, an' the next I was drug t'other way when I remembered our boy days when we used to dive off of 'high bank' an' play hooky together, an'—"

"Thar you go ag'in," Andrew said, impatiently. "The Lord may have understood you last night, but he is no doubt better at riddles 'n I am. If it ain't the money that I'm behind with, I don't see what you are prayin' about me for."

"Of course you can't see. You hain't sense enough to see an inch before your eyes these days. You can't see the fix I am in. I have my rights to be true to my country's cause, an' not feel bound, in any way, to come here

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like a traitor sneakin' from the ranks to warn you of what's ahead."

"Oh! *warn* me?" Andrew laughed lightly. "You warned me the day I got the money. Folks warn me every hour. I don't hear anything but warnings these times. The air is full of 'em."

"Your skull is thick, 'Drew, but I'm goin' to try to bore through it. I am makin' a spy o' myself to do this. My own son would disown me if he knowed it, but I'm goin' to give you some information, an' if it don't twist the grin to t'other side o' your face I'll be mistaken. You know about Buck Walker and his band o' mountain bush-whackers, don't you?"

"Oh yes, I know all about Buck," Andrew replied. "I had a fuss with him in the Square t'other day. I tol' 'im to his teeth that he had always been a dishonest man, an' that he was takin' advantage o' these times to do more depredations under pretense o' drummin' up soldiers for the Rebs. He drew his pistol to shoot me, an' he'd 'a' done it if he hadn't been afraid o' the law. He went off makin' threats."

"I understand better now," Webb snarled, "an' you think that sort o' talk, along with your freein' that nigger an' housin' a couple like them Dills, will make your path easy, do you?"

"I've always said what I thought was so, an' done what I thought was right, an' war-times won't stop me," Andrew returned, half smiling.

"But that's exactly whar you may fall down sooner than you expect," the farmer retorted. "Now, listen to me, 'Drew Merlin. I needn't tell you how I got wind o' this, because if I'm a traitor to any body of men that claims to be workin' for the side I'm on I will not involve any one else in my act. The thing that hurts me—burns me like the very fire o' hell—is that I was told about it because I'm known to be ready to give my life and all for

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the South. That's why I was told. That's why I was trusted. If I'd knowed what was comin' I'd have stopped the feller while he was talkin', but I was told—I was told, an' now I'm here, a dirty turncoat, tellin' a damn fool that I've always been friendly with that—that Buck Walker an' his men are comin' here to-night at twelve o'clock to take you out an' set on your case."

"Oh! that's it, eh?" Andrew was more serious now. His mobile face no longer lent itself to its constant tendency to smile. "I'm sorry, Jimmy, that I poked so much fun when you started to tell me. It ain't no laughin' matter. When Buck Walker sets a day and an hour to do a thing, he is always on time to the minute. He is a devil in the hide of a man—thar is no shadow of a doubt about that—and he's got his hot fork ready for me. He told me t'other day that he'd make me enlist with the Confederacy or he'd tote my scalp at his belt, and he don't love Dill, neither. Yes, Jimmy, I'm in a pickle. I see that powerful plain. When Buck and his gang get full o' rot-gut liquor and start on a rampage, letters o' fire blazing across the sky, weighing him and finding him wanting, wouldn't balk 'im for a second."

Webb raised himself up, twisted his hat between his hands, and slapped his leg with it, as he limped to a window and peered out to see if his mare was still at the fence. "I feel as mean as a houn'-dog"—it was his old refrain—"and yet I had to tell you, 'Drew Merlin. I don't know why I did it, for you any more 'n any other traitor, but I did. I hate ever'thing you stand for—ever' nigger-lovin' act an' idea, but I couldn't be a party to what's laid out for you to-night. They may give you one more chance to enlist. I don't know as to that. I understand that some of 'em said if you'd give your word of honor that you'd join their ranks that they would take it without question. They say—all of 'em say—that you never lied

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in your life. They say that in your favor, as much as they hate you."

"I never seed any good in lying." Andrew's face was full of angles and lines of concern. He fumbled in his vest pocket for his tobacco, and automatically bit off a piece of the flat brown plug. "But I'll tell you one thing certain, Jimmy," he went on, deliberately, "and that is that no matter what they do or threaten to do to-night, if they ketch me, I ain't a-goin' to enroll my name ag'in' this big wide Union o' States, for to me it's a Union yet and always will be."

"You don't know what you'll do," sneered Webb. "You don't till you are put to the pinch. I didn't know I'd do what I'm doin' now, but I did when the time come to decide on one course or the other. Take my advice, if you can't avoid trouble any other way, an' join us home folks. It will be the easiest way, an' if you did, you see—if you did, I wouldn't bother so much about the part I'm playin', for then I'd be makin' a soldier for our side, an' a good one."

"I see your p'int, Jimmy, but I'll not join you. A feller can't die but once, and I've always thought, since I have to pass on sooner or later anyway, that I'd rather be killed in my boots for some high principle than die in the ordinary lazy way in a bed."

"Well, good-by, 'Drew," said the old man, in a milder tone. "I hope you'll come out all right. I reckon you are goin' to try to get away?"

"Oh yes," Andrew said, grimly; "me 'n' Mart will try it, I reckon, and we may succeed, if we can get into the mountains. We won't start till nightfall. I'm much obliged to you for tellin' me, Jimmy. It certainly is the act of a true friend when all is considered."

When Webb had ridden away, the three women of the household, followed by the stalwart Dill in his shirt-

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sleeves, entered the sitting-room, their ears open for news which they now suspected was important. Andrew told them the circumstances as calmly and indifferently as if he were making the announcement of some coming event in which he was not particularly concerned. It reminded Anne of a time when he had come home from New York after having been exposed on the train to the smallpox. Without meeting his wife and children, he had retired to a cabin in the woods, and remained there several days alone to await the verdict of time as to whether he would take the disease, which at that period meant almost certain death. He would allow some one to bring his food to a tree in front of the cabin door and leave it, and then he would go out and get it. He was deporting himself in that manner now, amid all the excitement of the others.

Dill stood like a statue of gravity, his sharp elbow on the mantelpiece, his hat clutched in his long fingers, an ill-shod foot thrust out in front of him. It was noticeable that Ruth Merlin went alone to a window and stood with her back to the others. It was noticeable that Mandy Dill made no jest nor even smiled. It was noticed by Merlin, at least, that Anne was staring at him with eyes which were glistening and beaming with tenderness, blended with alarm. The silence was broken by Mrs. Dill.

"It seems to me, though I'm no judge," she began, "that it is all up with you two fellers. The Lord hisse'f will forgive a man for givin' up good work when he's whipped clean out. Many Union men that I know have been pulled into the ranks by Buck Walker's threats, an' I know in reason that if you two would go now to Captain Preston or to Tom Merlin's quarters an' offer to enlist they 'u'd protect you. They 'u'd put you right in camp with them an' Buck Walker would go on with his rat-killin' some'r's else."

"Oh yes, that 'u'd be as easy as fallin' off a log,"

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Andrew admitted, as he met Anne's wondrous gaze, "an', Dill, if you feel inclined to take Mandy's advice, don't let me hold you back. You see, I've done so much loud talkin' hereabouts that it is plumb out o' the question with me."

"I've talked some, too," Dill said, laconically, "an' I'm with you, 'Drew. Of course we could settle it by enlistin', but knowin' you as I think I do, that is not to be considered. The next thing is to git away—that's your idea, eh?"

"That's what I expect to do," Andrew answered, and they all heard a sigh escape the still form of Ruth Merlin at the window as she quietly turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE remainder of that day was passed in much agitation by the women of the household. Clothing and eatables that could be easily carried were being put into small bags. The two men sat against the wall of the house in the rear to be out of sight of the few passers-by in the street. Anne, of the three women, was by far the most disturbed. To her mind her father's danger was very great. She had gone to the Square to buy some heavy socks for him, and, in returning, was passing the front gate of the Preston home.

Arthur was on the lawn, watching one of the negroes catch a frisky young horse which he wanted to ride, when he descried her bonneted head above the white palings, and he hastened toward her.

"Anne, please wait a moment," he pleaded. "I want to see you."

She paused and looked up as he reached the fence. "What is it?" she asked, in a tone he had never before caught in her sweet voice. In her despair it was as if she were vaguely looking even to him for help.

"Oh, I don't know," he faltered. "That is, I don't know of any particular thing to say, now that I see you again, but, Anne, of late I've been awfully troubled. We used to be good friends before all this thing came up, and since you treated me as you did at your door the other day I have not thought of anything else."

"I treated you only as a lady ought to treat a man whose family openly insults her," Anne said, sharply. "They

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shall not say again, as they have said to many people, that I am trying to win you—trying to pull you down from your lofty height to my degraded position. There they are now. Look, they have come out into the yard to watch you. I can see their hatred on their faces even from here. You are their pet, their darling, and you are tied to their apron-strings so tight you can't walk alone."

"Please, Anne, listen!" he cried. "They are my people; I love them, but you know I do not approve of the way they treat you."

"Approve of it!" Anne tossed her head till the hood of her white bonnet slid farther back from her fair brow, showing her indignant eyes. "You talk as if it made any difference to me what you think or don't think. Folks say you are a gentleman; be a gentleman as far as I am concerned and don't humiliate me ever again by stopping me under the eyes of those two women."

"Oh, Anne, please—" he began, but a voice from the direction of the house checked him.

"Arthur, come here!" his mother called out, as she and her daughter stood staring at him. "Come here, please!"

He was too well-bred to retort roughly, but his handsome face was white with suppressed anger. "All right, mother," he called out. "I'll be there in a moment."

"Come on, I want to see you!" Mrs. Preston shouted.

"Anne, for God's sake pardon her," Arthur faltered, in a low, tortured voice. "She doesn't know what she is saying. Father's going to war has upset her. She hardly knows what she is doing. She walks the floor at night. She blames everything that even remotely bears on the Northern side of this matter. She says she has an intuition that father is to be killed, and as for Mary, you know she is led by my mother."

"Go to them, go to the poor things!" Anne said, as she turned away. "But don't speak to me again. Don't dare to. I don't want your friendship. No one can be a friend

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of mine who is not a friend of my father, and you are against him. You'd kill him to-day if you had your way."

He followed her along the fence for several paces, but as she kept her head down and hurried on he fell back and slowly turned to his mother and sister.

As for Anne, she strode on angrily. The contact with Arthur had for a moment lifted her father's peril from her mind, but by the time she had reached the gate of her home she was under its weight again. Entering the house, she put down the brown straw-paper parcel and turned to help her mother in the kitchen.

"I thought I saw Arthur Preston go out to you at the fence," Mrs. Merlin said, plaintively. "Did he know about this raid of Buck Walker's to-night?"

"I think not," Anne replied, with a shrug.

"Well, he may, and he may not," Mrs. Merlin sighed. "In war-times folks keep their lips tight. Brothers don't tell brothers war secrets. Captain Preston may know, and may have told Arthur, but Arthur wouldn't be allowed to warn us, friendly though he used to be. It is strange how this war has affected all of us. I used to think, from the way you and Arthur acted together, that some time when you was both older, you'd—you'd—well," sighing deeply, "you know what I mean?"

"I don't want to know what you mean, mother," Anne retorted, crisply. "I only know that I never want to lay eyes on him again."

"Oh yes, I reckon all that is over, like some o' my girl notions, away back yonder. Even after I married, an' you children was born, I thought we was goin' to rise an' stand with the best in the South. Your pa was right on the verge o' makin' a pile o' money in his dealings up North, an' with his brother Tom standin' so high in the community, I thought the day would come when we'd have a fine home, carriages and horses and niggers; but la me! look how it has turned out! I'm more sorry for

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Bob, somehow, than I am for you, for you don't seem to care any more for fine things than your pa does. But Bob is different. He frets night and day about our low position amongst other folks. I must have stamped my wishes on 'im just before his birth, for it was at that time that I was so anxious to see better days."

"Oh, mother," Anne cried, a catch in her fluttering throat, "how can you even mention such things to-day, when—when it may be the last you'll ever see of father? You don't know him thoroughly or you'd be concerned. He'll stand his ground; he'll refuse to enlist; Buck Walker hates him and will—will kill him."

Mrs. Merlin was roasting some coffee-beans in a frying-pan over a hole in the range. The dense, aromatic smoke rose into her face as she stirred the brown mass with a hot spoon. Anne saw her shrug her shoulders and heard her sigh.

"It's Bob that I'm thinking about," Ruth said. "The poor child knows about what is going to happen to-night and is humiliated over it. He is in the hayloft at the barn, lying up there in the fodder, crying. I was there just now, trying to pacify him, but nothing will console him. As he sees it, his father is running away from the danger and duty that his uncle and cousins are gladly going to meet. If he was old enough that boy would fight as long as a drop of his blood ran in his veins, and he'd fight for the South, too. Your pa don't dream o' that, and I haven't told him, for he has enough to bear, but he'll know it some day. You go down to the barn. Maybe if you—"

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" Anne burst forth. "He can cry for a month, for all I care. He ought to have sense enough to know that father cannot fight against what he thinks is right. Father loves the South, and it is because he loves it that he does not want to see it ruin itself by rebellion against the Union."

"I wonder"—Mrs. Merlin was emptying the roasted

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coffee into a pan, and stared blandly from her smoke-stung eyes at her daughter—"I wonder if he is the best judge of that, after all. I used to agree with him, but when I hear those fifes and drums and bugle-calls, and see the men and boys sweeping down from the mountains with shouts and songs and home-made flags to follow officers like your uncle, and see the way the women are ready to suffer and sacrifice their all—I wonder if the North can stand out against such fury and determination. City-bred men up there are not like these open-air fellows, accustomed to hunting and riding and fighting for their honor in duels. No, your pa doesn't know everything, by a long shot."

"I see how you look at it," Anne said, resignedly. "You've never listened when father explained it all from the standpoint of men like Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Father has been a prophet without honor all along, but one idea of his is worth a dozen of Uncle Tom's."

With a sigh, perhaps born of some other thought, Ruth turned away, leaving Anne alone in her growing distress.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANDREW and Dill were thankful for a cloudy night. When the sun sank it was threatening rain, and there was no sign of moon or starlight. Robert had been sent to drive the cow home from a near-by pasture, and it was quite dark when he returned. Anne and Mrs. Dill went out to the stable-yard with a torch and milked the cow, Anne holding the split pine downward to keep it burning.

"You don't seem bothered very much," Anne remarked, as the tiny nozzles shot the fluid against the ringing side of the tin pail and Mrs. Dill's bare head blended with the brown flank of the cow.

"Thar's no time for botherin' in days like these," was the half-laughing retort. "It's 'every man for himse'f, an' the devil take the hindmost.' Mart has already been in so many knock-down-an'-drag-out fights over this question and his friendship for your pa that I've got used to it. He will be showin' 'em a clean pair o' heels to-night, anyway, an' it will be the first time he has had to resort to it. I hope they will get away."

"Get away to where?" Anne faintly inquired.

"Oh, some'r's up North, I reckon," was the reply. "Time enough to think about that later. Dodgin' Buck Walker's gang will be the first consideration, an' the warnin' that old hell-cat gave 'em will help powerfully. It is hard to track men through them mountain gulches. I am bothered about one certain thing, though, an' I hain't mentioned it to your mother."

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"What is that?" Anne shifted the torch that she might get the profile of the milker out of the shadow of the pail.

"Why, it is something I overheard Mart an' your pa talkin' about betwixt 'em. They didn't think I was listenin'. I don't believe in eave'droppin' as a general rule, but in a case o' life an' death like this I think anything is justifiable, an' I admit I tried to catch some o' their talk to-day when they kept their heads together so close. Don't let on that I told you, but both of 'em are afraid that Buck may happen to fetch along a pair o' trained bloodhounds he's got."

"Bloodhounds?" Anne cried, aghast, and fell silent.

"Yes. They thought he might not, bein' as he expects to nab 'em without any trouble here in bed, but then ag'in, they thought he might accidentally bring 'em. In that case, you know, Mart an' your pa would have a slim chance, for the dogs would nose out their track an' lead the gang onto 'em."

"What do you think?" Anne's voice broke under the emotional strain that was on her.

"Well, I think the chances are about equal," was the slow reply. "Buck Walker is a sly devil. He says he is workin' for the South an' is goin' to offer his men to the Confederate army when the Governor wants 'em, but that may be just Buck's talk. He is full o' his own importance an' power now, an' my prediction is that as soon as the war gits under way he will turn hisse'f into a regular highway robber an' keep it up under pretense that he is defendin' the South."

The milking was finished. They were turning toward the house when they saw two forms approaching. It was the refugees, their packs on their backs.

"Oh, are you going now?" Anne cried out, impulsively.

"Yes, we've said good-by to the others," Andrew answered, a wave of tenderness in his voice. "Me 'n' Mart

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thought we ought to put as many miles behind us as we can before midnight."

Mrs. Dill had put down the pail and was extending her milk-damp hand to her stalwart spouse. "Well, take care o' yourself, Mart," she said, bravely.

"An' you do the same, Mandy," he returned, stoically. "An' remember if we don't meet ag'in in this world that it will be all right in the Almighty's sight, for we've done the best we could, when all is considered."

Anne was holding the torch so that its light fell on her father's face, and something there caught and held her attention more than any facial expression of his had ever done. Her grief rose in a flood within her, and she dropped the torch, and in the sudden darkness threw herself into his arms.

"I'll never see you again!" she sobbed. "This is the last time I'll—"

"Shucks! my baby, my brave little girl!" he faltered, husky of voice in spite of his self-control. "This hain't nothing but a little spurt that me 'n' Mart are going to take to limber our legs up. We know the mountains as well as any o' them fellers do, and we'll have several hours' start of 'em."

"But they will ride and you are afoot," Anne sobbed under the broad hand that was tenderly stroking her face.

"Oh yes, but we are doin' it by choice," Andrew explained, steadily. "We can make better headway by cross-cuts through the woods, while for the most part they will have to follow the roads, let down a lot o' fences, an' jump a lot o' ditches—eh, Mart?"

"A sight of 'em, 'Drew," Dill said, as a man might who was following the suggestion of a superior.

"But if they should bring along the bloodhounds," Anne faltered, "then what would you do?"

"Bloodhounds?" Andrew glanced swiftly at his companion. "What could 'a' put *that* idea in your head?"

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"Well, you know Buck *has* them," Anne persisted. "He has used them before. You remember he did when some of his negroes tried to run away a year ago."

"Yes, I believe he did," Andrew said, lightly, "but he won't fetch 'em to-night, Anne, for, you see, he expects to take us unawares. Now if old Jimmy Webb hadn't warned me, Buck would 'a' had it all his own way. I reckon we'd better be going now, Mart. But, daughter, there is one thing I set aside to tell you before I go"—he glanced, somewhat abashed, at Dill and his wife, who now moved a few steps away—"an' that is that I want you to be as sweet an' patient with your ma and Bob as you know how. I'm bothered about 'em both. I don't blame 'em one bit for feelin' like they do over this thing. They are followin' their natures, just as me an' you are followin' ourn. They can't help bein' jest what they are—the Creator made 'em that-a-way—why, I don't know, but he did. They are sufferin' in their way as much as we are in ourn. I was sorry fer 'em when I left 'em back thar just now. Bob would hardly speak, he was so sulky, an' your ma jest looked dazed an' resigned, an' acted a little bit like she laid the blame all on me. Well, I may be—I may be to blame. I tuck 'er from 'er home, an' promised to give 'er another just as good; but, say, daughter, I hain't done it. These big national ideas got me in their clutch, an' through them I've driven away all my kin an' hern. I've turned all our neighbors ag'in' us, an' made my own son look on me with loathin' before he is old enough to think it all out for himse'f. The little property that I was pinchin' myse'f to keep together for you an' them will not amount to anything unless I live to push it along, an' thar's no tellin' how I may come out of all this. You may as well make up your mind that even more trouble may lie ahead, and if you live to be an old woman, daughter, and have children and grandchildren, I want you to tell 'em, in spite o' all that may be said to the contrary, that I done

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the best I could, according to my dim lights. Here is another thing: Old Jimmy said that if Buck caught me to-night that he might spare my life if I'd agree to fight contrary to my principles. Now I want you at least to hear this from my lips as final. If he does run me down and gives me such a chance, I'll refuse. So if you hear of anything happening to me, or if I never report alive, I want you to know that I died rather than crawfish from what I hold as right. I'd rather die ten ordinary deaths than to die one while shirkin' my duty. Now, good-by—good-by; do the best you kin, an'—an' pray for divine aid. Help is some'r's—it must be, an' we must have faith. I feel the need o' the Lord's hand to-night more 'n I ever did before. Them clouds up thar seem to stand betwixt me 'n' him, but they may break after a while."

He kissed Anne and turned to shake hands with Mrs. Dill. "Me 'n' Mart's got up a walkin'-match." He laughed as he dropped her hand. "We are goin' to see which one calls a halt first."

"If you beat Mart you'll be a dandy," Mrs. Dill said, lightly. "I remember one day that he laid forty miles behind 'im in rough, hilly country betwixt sunup an' sun-down. Be good to yourse'ves, hustle through them woods, an' write us how you come on, if you kin git word to us, which I doubt. The folks in charge o' the mail would open anything for us."

"Yes, we may not be able to write, or send word, either," Andrew said. "So if you don't hear, it won't mean anything serious."

As the two men climbed over the rail fence and disappeared in the dark, Mrs. Dill turned to Anne.

"Come, my dear," she said. "Let's be as plucky as they are. Let's not let anybody say women are unable to meet trouble. I've had a hard row to hoe all my life, an' I don't know if I regret a bit of it. To look at me in this raggety dress an' shoes, with this bucket in my hand,

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an' my hair all tousled up, you wouldn't think that I was popular with young men once, would you? Well, I just was. I had the pick o' four likely ones, an' what did I do but take the one folks said was the most shiftless of the lot. I wanted him, he wanted me, and we got tied, an' have stayed tied ever since. If the knot is to be broke to-night—well, I won't be the first widow in the world, an' I've had Mart a good many years now."

CHAPTER XXIX

THEY found Robert and his mother in the kitchen. The boy was seated in the light of a tallow-dip at the small table, eating his supper while his mother brooded over him, anxious to attend to his needs.

"If you two want anything to eat you'll have to get it yourselves," she said to Anne and Mrs. Dill. "I'm tired; I'm limp as a dish-rag. My head aches; I feel like it's going to burst; I'm crazy—crazy—crazy! You ought to hear how Bob carries on. He talks about running away and leaving me alone under all this. I couldn't stand it. I've stood a lot, but that would kill me. He's all I got left now."

"Bob, you ought to be ashamed," Mrs. Dill reproached him, as she put the pail on the table. "Hasn't your mother enough to bear without you sayin' such foolish things?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," the boy snapped, pale and angry. "I'm not like you and your husband, or father, or Anne. I want a home and friends like other boys. Father brought this on us, and now he has gone and left us with the bag to hold. I'd fight Buck Walker to-night if I had any excuse, but he is right—he is right! Father and Mart Dill are traitors, and Buck Walker has a right to come after them. Uncle Tom is right. He is an educated man, while father never went to college. Father has the same ideas that the niggers and the lowest whites have."

"I won't dispute with you, Bobby," Mrs. Dill said,

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genially. She attempted to lay a pacific hand on the youth's disheveled hair, but he dodged it angrily and suddenly lowered his head to the table in an attitude of despair.

The three women were all silent, and presently he rose and stalked from the room. He went through the house and sat down on the top step of the veranda.

"Mother, you can go to bed," Anne said. "Mrs. Dill and I will sit up. You need rest and quiet."

"Go to bed? How foolish!" wailed Ruth. "As if any human being could, with a thing like this hanging over them. There is no telling what Buck or his gang will do when they find out they've been tricked."

Anne was unable to formulate an adequate reply, and in silence her mother followed Robert to the veranda, where, a moment later, Mrs. Dill and Anne found them side by side. Ruth had persuaded her son to put his head into her lap, and sat stroking his hair soothingly.

The lights in the house were out and Mrs. Dill and Anne sat down to await the outcome. The hours dragged by. The striking of the clock at ten reminded Anne that it had not been wound, for her father had always attended to it just before retiring. So she went to the sitting-room where the old weighted and wooden-wheeled relic stood on the mantelpiece. As she took up the crank-shaped brass key the thought that it might never again be held by her father's fingers came over her like a crushing billow of despair. And as she opened the ornamented glass door and put the key into its place she sobbed without restraint. To control her emotions she passed the mute occupants of the veranda, descended to the yard, and walked to the gate. Leaning on its top, she tried to form a prayer for her father's safety, but somehow the words refused to rise out of the chaos of her agony. Another hour went by. How still was the village in its slumber! Even the new-made soldiers were asleep, ex-

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hausted from their all-day drilling. Perhaps only the pickets around the tented spaces were awake. Presently she heard the far-off clatter of the hoofs of a galloping horse on the hard gravel road leading down from the nearest mountain. The sound came nearer. There was no slackening of the speed. The rider was now drawing rein at Preston's gate.

"Hello, Marse Arthur! Dat you, suh?" and a waiting negro stepped out of the gate.

"Yes." The horseman swung himself to the ground. "Hold my horse a minute. I've got to ride on to father's camp. He is not at home, is he?"

"No, suh, but ole mis' is plumb 'stracted 'count you, young marster. She don't know what happened ter you."

"Hold my horse. I'll be back in a minute," Arthur ordered, and to Anne's surprise she saw him striding toward her. She thought at first that he was going to pass her, and was turning to avoid meeting him when he suddenly called out, in a voice full of agitation: "Wait there, please! Who is that?"

"It is I," Anne said, coldly. "What is it you want?"

"Oh, it is you, Anne!" clutching the top of the gate with the hand that held his riding-whip. "I want to see your father at once—at once!"

She stared perplexed for a moment, then said, simply, "You can't see him."

"But I *must*, Anne, I *must*! It is most urgent—not a moment to lose."

"Can't you leave the—the message with me?" Anne asked, undecided as to the wisest course to pursue.

"No, I can't. I must see him personally, Anne. For God's sake, call him! Tell him I must see him! Is Dill still here? Call him, too. If they are in bed get them up, quick, quick!"

She stood staring calmly. He wondered why she was

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acting so strangely. "Hurry, Anne! for God's sake, hurry!" he pleaded, his hands on the gate, his face close to hers. "It is a matter of life and death."

"Arthur, where are you?" It was his mother's voice from the corner of the yard beyond the dividing fence.

"Here, mother. I'll be there in a moment," he called out. "I'm all right. Don't worry. Hurry, Anne, I must see your father."

Anne put her face closer to his. She had come to a decision. "Father and Mr. Dill have both gone away," she said.

"Oh, are you sure? Are you sure—absolutely sure?"

"Yes, they left several hours ago."

"Thank God!" he faltered, in a full voice of relief. "Then—then my—my—business with your father can wait till—till I see him."

Anne said nothing. Mrs. Preston was calling again, and Anne turned away. Lifting his hat, Arthur went to meet his mother, who was now on the sidewalk, advancing toward him.

"Where have you been?" Anne heard her asking. "Mary and I have been crazy over your delay, and why did you go to Merlin's first? What under the sun has got into you?"

"Hush, mother! Not so loud, for pity's sake!" Anne heard Arthur pleading, as he led the irate woman farther away. Their voices died down into a low hum as they reached his horse and he remounted.

"What did he want?" Mrs. Merlin asked, with only faint interest.

"Wanted to see father on urgent business of some sort," Anne replied.

"Did you tell him he was gone?" Mrs. Merlin asked, still indifferently.

"Yes, and he said the business could wait," Anne returned. "Did you hear his mother? She never lets him

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out of her sight, but it doesn't matter. Nothing matters any longer."

"Huh!" Mrs. Dill snickered significantly. "An' of course you hain't the slightest idea o' what that important business was? Huh! Greenhorn that I am, I could lay my finger on it an' never half try. Double-blindfold me in pitch dark, an' I'd hit it the fust stab."

Anne was steadily staring through the gloom at the speaker, but she made no response.

"Huh, business! I say business!" Mrs. Dill laughed out. "An' he rid down the mountain like a thousand catamounts was after 'im to attend to it, eh? An' as soon as he found your pa was gone he said, 'Thank God!' eh?"

"Did you hear his mother?" Anne's submerged voice rose to the surface on a wave of anger.

"Hear 'er?" Mrs. Dill chuckled. "A woman like that could cackle like ten thousand mad wet hens at me, an' if she'd hatched out such a fine young game-cock as that un I'd excuse it of her, especially if he tipped his hat to me. I don't blame 'im for the side he's on. He'd be a poor excuse if he didn't stand by his daddy's flag. An' his comin' to-night like this, when all is considered, is one o' the purtiest acts I ever run across. Anne, you know what he come for as well as I do, an' a little tiny, no-account feller would have told you in order to git the credit of it, but Arthur didn't. Findin' he couldn't be of help, he walks away pretendin' that what he come for didn't amount to a hill o' beans."

"He is in with Buck Walker," Anne retorted, coldly, her thoughts upon her fleeing parent. "They are friends. I've often seen them together."

"But he turned ag'in' Buck in this case, don't forget that," Mrs. Dill reminded her. Then the conversation ended. There were graver things to be thought of.

The stillness of the night was broken again, this time by the hoofs of Arthur Preston's horse as it galloped

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toward his father's camp. The clock struck eleven. The coil of steel wire jangled dismally through the house. Robert was asleep; his mother seemed almost so; her passive hand lay still on her son's rough hair; her head was sinking downward. Suddenly, afar off, up the mountain road down which Arthur had recently come, was heard a low rumble comparable to that of distant thunder.

"Horses!" Mrs. Dill said, succinctly, "an' a plenty of 'em. They're on time. Old Webb was well informed."

"Sh!" Mrs. Merlin had heard. "Don't tell Bobby yet. Le'me try to get him up to his bed. What's the use of exciting him?"

Gently she raised the boy to a sitting posture, and he swung to and fro unconsciously. She stood up and drew him to his feet. "Come, go to bed, darling," she half cooed. "We've sat out here long enough."

Half asleep, he was led into the hall and up the dark stairs. Anne heard his feet striking the steps as he slowly lifted them. A moment later she saw the flare of a candle as its light rose in the bedroom above and fell upon the grass. In a few minutes Mrs. Merlin returned. She did not sit down again, but leaned in the doorway, listening to the growing rumble from the mountain road.

"How far off are they?" she asked, resignedly.

"Just t'other side o' the mill now," was Mrs. Dill's calm answer. "Oh, won't they be hot when they find out that the birds are gone? You may count on rough talk, in my opinion. I know Buck. I danced with the rascal at a shindig once, when he was a gay dandy. I may ax 'im to be my partner to-night. Lord! I'm not one bit afraid of 'im. Are you two?"

There was no answer. Levity seemed an incongruous thing at the present moment; moreover, its ring in this case was somewhat forced. They had not long to wait. Two by two, with a single horseman in the lead, the band, numbering fifty or more, slowly approached, drew rein

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at the gate, and sedately ranged themselves along the fence, the heads of the horses bobbing and jerking above it.

"Hello, inside thar!" It was plain from the raised voice that Buck Walker had not descried the trio on the veranda, for it was an evident effort to rouse a sleeping house.

"Hello out thar, yourse'f, Buck Walker!" Mrs. Dill called out. "What is it you want this time o' night? You see I know your voice, Buck, though you may not remember mine. I'm Mandy Dill that used to be Mandy Trotter, over at Ducktown. How do you come on? How is things with you?"

There was a pause, then a smothered oath was heard, followed by what seemed to be a hurried exchange of words in low tones between the leader and a man on his right.

"'Light, hitch, an' surround the house!" Buck was heard ordering. "Thar is somethin' crooked about that bunch on the porch at this time o' night."

There was a sound of straining stirrup-straps and girths, a clanking of wheeled spurs, the thumping of booted feet on the ground, the jerking of reins on the palings. Buck Walker, entering the gate, met Mrs. Dill face to face.

"What's all this about, anyway?" she demanded. "You remember me, don't you, Buck? Remember the night me 'n' you an' some more boys an' girls—"

"I haven't time to talk, Mrs. Dill." He had lifted his broad-brimmed white hat from his mass of long hair and was swinging it sullenly at his side. "We've got to get 'Drew Merlin and Mart Dill out of bed. We want to see them right off on an important matter."

"That's bad, an' I'm powerful sorry, Buck." She was stroking a steady chin as if nothing more unusual were taking place than meeting with him at church on a quiet Sunday. "The truth is, both of 'em took the train to-night. 'Drew had a little business to attend to in Atlanta,

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and took Mart along for company. They will be back to-morrow. If it is anything important, an' you'll tell me, why—"

"Surround the house, boys!" Buck called out to the men now filing through the gate. "Them fellows are hiding somewhere about. These women heard us coming an' are out here for a blind."

"Oh, I see you don't believe me." Mrs. Dill laughed softly. "That is downright impolite of you, Buck."

"No, I don't believe you, Mandy," the outlaw said, grimly. "I know you of old. You'd joke if the world was comin' to an end. Go ahead, boys—clean around the house an' stable. When they come out shoot if they resist."

"Well, how are you goin' to prove I'm a liar, Buck?" Mrs. Dill asked. "Surely you won't search the house with a child asleep up-stairs."

"That's just what we are goin' to do, Mandy," he answered. And seeing that he meant it, and fearing for the safety of her boy, Mrs. Merlin slipped into the hall and ascended the stairs. Then eight or ten delegated men with pistols and lighted candles in their hands started into the house, while others went through the barn and stable. Anne stood on the veranda with Mrs. Dill, listening to the resounding tread on the floors above and below and on the groaning stairs. Presently the men all came out, meeting their leader just as the searchers of the stable and barn rounded the corner of the house.

"Not here, Cap," was the disappointed report. "We have searched every crack an' hole. They have been told—that's plain, an' since yesterday, too."

"You see I wasn't lyin' to you, Buck," Mrs. Dill said, with a satisfied laugh. "You'd 'a' saved a lot o' time if you'd taken the word of a lady. They are in Atlanta by now, havin' a high old time, I reckon, like you men usually do when off on a spree."

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"You may be right, an' you may not, Mandy," Buck said, gallantly. "I'll decide in a minute. Heigh, Seth! go back thar an' get the dogs. Lead 'em around the house, untie 'em, an' let 'em pick up the scent, an' follow 'em the best you can."

"Huh, dogs, I say!" burst from the startled lips of Mrs. Dill, and then she was silent as the bushwhacker whirled away to speak to some of his men.

Anne saw her mother emerging from the door, and the three women stood together as a man leading two blood-hounds came in at the gate and went around the house.

"Mount, all of you!" Buck ordered, "an' be ready. We'll pay the skunks for this trick."

The sharp, exultant baying of the hounds was heard in the rear, followed by the keen whistle of their master, and instantly the air was stirred by the hoofs of whirling horses as they galloped after the hounds, which were now excitedly plunging into the thicket behind the house.

"I was hopin' that the dogs wouldn't be along," said Mrs. Dill to her companions. "It is bad enough, but they still have a chance to get away. They may take to a stream o' water an' throw off the scent. Let's hope that, anyway."

Mrs. Merlin took a deep breath and sighed. "They didn't wake 'im up," she said. "They peeped in and saw him asleep and slipped away easy-like. They didn't even search the room carefully. There is some decency in them."

Anne stood as if petrified. Alone, she went behind the house and stood listening to the baying of the dogs and the shouting of the men in the pursuit of the one she loved above all others. She remained there, damp with dew, and chilled, till the sounds had died away in the distance.

CHAPTER XXX

TO avoid the possibility of being seen, the two fugitives, when they left home, had crept across the open lots and through the woods surrounding the village, and did not attempt to increase their speed till they had reached the denser forest of the mountain region. Then they walked briskly.

"I'll show you a snug cave at the foot of Blue Ridge, fifteen miles due north, whar we can stop an' rest," Andrew remarked, cheerfully. "It is walled in by a regular jungle that nothin' will live in but rattlesnakes. I found it when I was prospectin' for marble an' iron-ore awhile back. Indians must 'a' had it for a den or hidin'-place. I picked up a lot o' flint spear-heads an' arrow-p'int's thar."

"I'm followin' you, 'Drew," Dill answered "I don't know a livin' man that I'd trust my life to any quicker. What's botherin' me is what are we goin' to do when we git away from Buck's gang."

"Oh," Merlin smiled, "I reckon we'll have to shift the best we know how till the coast is clear to git back home. When war's under full sway Buck an' his sort will be too busy to waste time on us."

They were now on the side of a mountain overlooking the village and in the distance saw the lights of several houses which they were able to locate, and remarked that their own home was dark. For an hour they stumbled along through the darkness over hitherto untrodden ground, often finding themselves enmeshed in vines, thorny underbrush, and on the brink of dangerous gullies

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in their precaution to avoid the main roads or well-worn paths. Consulting his old silver watch by striking a sulphur match and hiding its flare beneath his hat, Andrew saw that it was twelve o'clock. "It will be sun-up before we git to my hole at this rate," he said. "A body can't make decent speed over ground like this."

They talked little, that they might reserve their strength. They had reached the lowlands again, and on level and more open ground they sped along for an hour or more in what they thought was the direction they had chosen, when suddenly Andrew stopped and stood staring blankly at an object in front of him.

"My God!" he cried out. "Can it be possible that we—"

"What's wrong? I don't see nothin'," Dill said.

"Why, that beech thar, with them low limbs tetching the ground. As sure as the sun shines we passed it, away back before we begun to go up the mountain. Lord! Lord! we've been goin' round and round. We are inside o' five miles, on a bee-line, of my house when we ought to be fifteen further north."

"Do you reckon?" Dill gasped.

"I know it," Andrew said, gloomily. "Them shitifng clouds helped fool us. Let's hurry. We'd better keep on a level and throw the mountain to the right. That will be our best guide."

"It was two o'clock when they paused to rest for a moment and sank down on a drift of dry leaves and pine needles. "I'm dead tired, an' I know you are." Merlin laughed, softly. "I'd love the best in the world to stretch out here an' snooze away till daybreak. We can't make much progress in this darkness. I wouldn't be in such a hurry, Mart, but they are sure to follow us, an' they will take this direction, too, for they will know that we'll be apt to head for the Tennessee line to git under Union protection. Thar is a lot o' Union men up about Knoxville."

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"That's so," Dill replied, and after that they were silent. Their tired bodies began to sway back and forth; their heads sank till their chins touched their chests. Dill was beginning to snore. Suddenly Merlin sat up.

"What was that?" he asked, excitedly. "Listen, Mart; thar it is ag'in! Don't you hear that steady thumpin' sound?"

"I do, now that you call my attention to it," Dill responded. "What do you reckon—"

"Hosses, Mart, old man!" Merlin broke in, as he rose to his feet, followed by his friend. "Hosses an' a whole lot of 'em! That's Red Clay Road down thar, an' Buck's cavalry is on it an' rushin' this way like the woods afire."

"Well, what are we goin' to do?" Dill adjusted his pack on his shoulders and grimly stared through the gloom.

"The only thing I see now is to stay some'r's about here, under cover, and let 'em pass us," Merlin suggested, thoughtfully. "If we can manage that till it is light enough to see whar we are going, we may keep out of sight through the day, by dodging, till they give up the hunt. Them trifling fellers are busy all about, and may not bother long over us."

"That's the only chance now," Dill admitted, and for a moment they stood listening to the dull pounding of hoofs, which was constantly growing plainer.

Suddenly Merlin spoke: "Thar's one point that has been bothering me some, I'll admit, Mart, old man; it keeps coming into my head."

"What is it?" his companion inquired.

"Why, it is this, Mart. Thar are six different roads leadin' out o' Delbridge. Don't it seem a little bit quar that Buck jumped onto this one, without losin' a minute? Now somebody saw us leave, or—or some'n' a dern sight worse is the case."

"You mean—"

"I mean bloodhounds, Mart. I've had 'em on my mind

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ever since we started, but I didn't want to bother you over it. They are the very devil to contend with. I'll put my skill an' strength ag'in' the average man, but not ag'in' red-fanged beasts like them. I can't imagine a hell wuss than an endless pit full o' them things. Let's move easy an' git as far away from the road as we kin."

Without a word Dill acquiesced, and they strode forward, now headed for the rugged part of the nearest mountain. They had advanced only a few paces when Merlin suddenly stopped and laid a swift, detaining hand on the arm of his companion.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, under his breath.

"I still hear the hosses, 'Drew. They make a steady roar like a big waterfall I seed once."

"I hain't absolutely sure, Mart, but it sounded to me like a keen whistle. Seth Barrett has charge of Buck's dogs. I heard him whistle to 'em once when they was tracking down a convict that broke jail in town, and it sounded exactly like that. Thar it goes ag'in! My Lord! listen, old man! Hear that? It is them bloodhounds yelping as sure as I'm chewing tobacco. If we can't strike a stream of water to wade in, we are goners, and we are three miles from even a little one. Listen! They are on our scent. That's the way they always bark when they catch it fresh. What are we to do? You know as well as I do."

"I'm afeard we are done for," Dill answered, grimly. "Runnin' won't do a bit o' good. Them dogs kin go twice as fast as we kin. They will be on us in five minutes."

"Yes, we are done for, Mart, old man. Can't you sing a lively song or tell a funny yarn?" Merlin actually sat down, seeing a log close by. However, he was on his feet again in a moment. "Them bloodhounds will strip the meat from our bones, if we let 'em git at us," he said. "The only thing for us to do now is to shin up a tree an' keep out o' reach o' the dogs till the men come an' take

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us. That oak thar suits my eye. Suppose we go up the same one—we might want to swap tobacco or consult together."

Dropping their packs, they hurried to the trunk of the tree in question, and, being good climbers, they were soon in the midst of the thick foliage about fifteen feet from the ground.

"A purty how-d'-do!" Merlin grunted. "This is defendin' the great Union, ain't it? The entire Government, Abe Lincoln, an' all the rest is shattered by a couple o' bloodhounds. Well, Buck will treat us fair, Mart—as fair as he kin from his way o' lookin' at things. It is my opinion that he will give us a chance to enlist, an' if we will do that he will wipe out all past differences."

"I was thinkin' o' that"—Dill edged himself along the gnarled bough to get a less painful seat, his long legs hanging straight down—"an' of course I'd like to know how you feel about it before he comes. You know, I reckon that Buck wouldn't hesitate to shoot or hang us if we refuse to j'in' the Confederates."

"It hain't for you to go by what I do or do not do, in as important a crisis as this is," Merlin answered, solemnly. "You'll have your chance an' I'll have mine. As for me, Mart, I'm in a awkward fix. I've been talkin' for the Union so long and so loud, and trying to live up to the idea, in a way, that now I'd not really be able to fight on t'other side. A feller has to have some'n' to gain to do a thing o' that sort with any spirit. I don't think I could go through it—if—if—you know what I mean."

"Then—then"—Dill's voice wavered under the tense delicacy of the situation—"then you mean, 'Drew, that you'd actually let 'em shoot or hang you?"

Merlin's answer was delayed for a moment. He seemed to be listening to the baying of the approaching hounds and the encouraging whistle of their mounted master.

"I don't want you to be led by me, Mart," Merlin

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seemed to feel that his answer ought not to be delayed longer, "and I want you to feel free to act as your conscience and desires dictate. But as for me, I can say now that I'd rather die and be done with it. I can't take orders from any man—much less one that I know is dead wrong and is trying to make me the same. Remember, Mart, that you've a wife—"

"You've got one, and two children besides," Dill interrupted. "'Drew, I'm goin' to do exactly what you do—pine blank the same."

"Well, you know your mind, Mart, I reckon. Give me your hand."

They clasped hands there in the leafy shadows as the sounds of their approaching doom grew louder and nearer.

The wait was a short one. The hounds were the first to appear. From the low underbrush they dashed forward, sniffing, snorting—their sleek dun coats hardly discernible against the soil. Around the tree they pranced, now and then standing on their hind feet and pawing the bark of the oak. Seth Barrett's horse bore him into view before any of the others. The next was Buck Walker's mettlesome stallion, blowing like a porpoise and afoam with sweat. The remainder of the band quickly encircled the tree.

"Call off the dogs!" Buck commanded, in a raised voice, not devoid of a ring of triumph, and the order was obeyed by Barrett, who had dismounted and was lashing the hounds with his whip. Silence presently fell.

"Are they both up there?" Buck was trying to see through the foliage of the oak.

"Side by side, Cap, like a pair o' rain-soaked screech-owls." Seth laughed as he stood at the foot of the tree and peered up its trunk.

"Yes, we are both here, Buck," Andrew called out, "an' if you'll just keep them dern pups quiet we'll slide down."

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"Well, be quick about it!" Walker growled, angrily. "You've given us enough bother for one night."

"Come on, Mart," Merlin was heard saying, in an effort to jest, "this ain't no place to sleep, an' we are plumb fagged out."

"We'll give you a place to sleep, all right!" Buck sneered. "Hurry up, hurry up!"

Down the trunk of the tree the two prisoners slid and stood before their captor, their heads up.

"Take it cool, don't they, Cap?" Seth Barrett said, with an admiring chuckle. "Look like they are standin' up to be measured for their weddin'-clothes."

"Attention, men!" Buck called out, sweeping the assembled horsemen with a steady gaze. "I want you all to witness this thing. You know what we are out after, an' you know what we will have to do if our demands are not met to the letter. These men have been ag'in' our country, sowin' seeds of dissension—black traitors in our midst. I believe them to be honest at heart, though, an' I believe if they agree to enlist in our cause that they will do it."

"Hear, hear!" a guttural voice chimed in. "You can count on 'Drew Merlin, Cap; he'll keep his word if he ever gives it."

"Yes, yes, he'll do it," another voice joined in, "and he'll make a good soldier."

"Thanks, gentlemen," responded Merlin, with an accent peculiar to him when deliberately speaking in public. "I appreciate the compliment. But don't leave my friend Dill out when you set in to brag on me. I've tried the skunk many a time, if you hain't."

"You mean, then, that you are willin' to join us?" Walker said.

"Oh no, not that, Buck!" Merlin promptly corrected. "I jest wanted to testify to a personal knowledge of Mart's veracity and general backbone. If he has to die

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to-night at your hands don't let 'im go with a smudge on his reputation. You fellers are saying so many good things about me that you are ignoring him. As for lying, I don't believe you could make 'im tell one, even if you applied red-hot irons to his eyes. And as for his fighting qualities, why, maybe you never heard tell o'—"

"Stop!" Buck was becoming angry. "Don't interrupt me."

"All right, Buck, but I was just goin' to say—"

"Stop, I tell you!" And as Merlin lapsed into silence Walker looked around him at his mounted men and said: "Boys, 'Drew Merlin seems to think this is a jokin' matter. We've got to act, and act at once. There is no time to waste. As you know, they are havin' trouble with the niggers that are about to rise over on the river at Pendleton's Quarter. We are needed there at once. Now shall we hang or shoot these men?"

"If we are in the hurry you speak of, Cap," the raised voice was recognized by Merlin as that of Sam Webb, the son of his tried friend, and he nudged Dill with his elbow. "If we've got to hurry, shootin' would be quicker an' safer. They tell me that mistakes are sometimes made in hangin', while a body as full o' holes as a sifter is done for."

"A good suggestion, gentlemen," the mounted chairman announced, formally, "and I'll put it to a vote. All in favor of shootin', instead o' using the ropes, say Aye!"

"Aye! Aye! Aye!" sounded around the circle, haltingly at first, and then in a volume.

"All right; then that's settled," said Walker.

"Thar's one thing I'd like to mention." Sam Webb spurred his horse to the front. "How about making 'em tell who warned 'em to-night?"

"We'll have to rule that part out, Sam," said the leader, judiciously. "In a court-martial like this it wouldn't be fair to ask men that are facing instant death to betray a friend."

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"All right, Cap, I stand corrected," Webb replied, testily. "I was just curious to know. Thar was a few hints going the rounds to-night that reflected on my family, and I wanted it cleared up while some witnesses were alive to talk."

"Don't lug all that in here, Sam!" Walker bit the butt of his whip impatiently. "We are losing the time we set in to save. Attention, men! We must select the firing-squad. Sergeant West, drop all the numbers in your hat and draw out the first six. That will be plenty."

About ten minutes were consumed in tearing leaves from a note-book, marking them in the light of a square lantern and dropping them into the hat.

"Now shake 'em up good!" Walker ordered. "Are you ready? Now draw out the first six and call 'em out loud. Remember your numbers, boys!"

"Thirteen!" announced the lantern-holder, in a clear, rasping voice.

"Jump down and step over in front of the prisoners as you are called," Walker ordered, "and have your pistols ready. If they won't work, borrow from somebody."

"Twenty-one!" the calling continued. "Thirty! forty-two! eighteen! eleven!"

"All right!" Walker said. "Now stand the prisoners over thar ag'in' that big rock!"

"You mean this un here, Buck?" Merlin asked, moving toward the boulder in question. "Come on, Mart; they are in a hurry. Let's accommodate 'em all we kin. We've give 'em a hard ride to-night, an' they've got further to go, it seems."

"Sh!" hissed the leader. "Did you hear that, boys? Wasn't that Pete Leftwich's whistle?"

"It sure was, Cap!" Seth Barrett whistled loudly himself, and a sound like an echo was returned from the road. "Yes, that's Pete. He's ridin' this way like all possessed. Want to wait till he comes, Cap?"

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Walker surveyed the two erect prisoners and the six armed men who faced them with their drawn weapons. "Yes, see what Pete wants. 'Drew Merlin, you an' Dill hain't long to live. Make your peace with God. I'll give you five minutes while I speak to this messenger."

"Thanks, Buck," Merlin said, calmly.

The crashing of a horse through the underbrush was heard growing nearer and nearer, and presently it and its rider plunged into view.

"Cap, you are needed on the river! Niggers risin'—got hold o' some Confederate guns—they are raisin' hell, threatenin' women an' children!"

"Quick, boys, fall in line thar to do your shootin'!" Walker cried. "Don't let a shot miss. Three on the right aim at Merlin—three on the left at Dill. Wait till I count three."

There was a breathless pause. Buck Walker had lowered his head as if averse to seeing what was to take place. He did not begin to count so soon as his followers expected.

"Listen, 'Drew Merlin," he said, solemnly. "I'm goin' to give you a chance. I hate to see as plucky a fellow as you are shot like a dog. Think this over quick. If you'll promise to enlist we'll take your word for it—we are all willin' to do that. If you'll promise to enlist we'll ride on an' let you make your way back home as you like."

There was a momentous silence, then Merlin spoke, and to no one present was his answer so surprising as it was to Dill.

"All right, Buck, I agree to enlist. I give you my word an' honor as a man that I'll enlist."

"Good. That's common sense!" Walker breathed in relief. "How about you, Dill?"

"I'll go with 'Drew, Buck, if that is satisfactory."

"All right. Turn 'em loose, boys, an' let's be off. They'll make good fighters. Take your choice, Merlin. You can

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join your brother's men or Preston's. It is all the same to us."

As the horsemen dashed off through the woods, the hoofs of their mounts throwing back showers of gravel, Merlin turned to his pack, slowly picked it up, and fastened it on his shoulders.

"We'd as well be on the move, too, Mart," he said.

Dill took up his pack, but said nothing as he strapped it on his back. He had turned his face toward Delbridge, and began to wonder why Merlin stood so still and was so silent. "I reckon you want to git home as soon as possible to keep the women folks from worryin'—is that it, 'Drew?'"

"If they worry, they will have to stan' it, that's all," came from the chest more than from the lips of Merlin, and then, his head down, he still stood immovable, an odd stare in his eyes.

"I don't know exactly what you mean, 'Drew,'" Dill ventured, experimentally. "Of course, if you want to lie down awhile an' rest before—"

"I'm wonderin' if you was surprised by the promise I made just now," Merlin broke in, with a sigh, and a sigh was a rare thing from him.

Dill hesitated before speaking, and seemed embarrassed. "That's a ticklish sort of a question, 'Drew,'" he finally got out. "In a matter o' that sort every man is supposed to act as he thinks fit."

"That ain't what I axed you!" Merlin retorted, sharply. "Spit it out, Mart—tell me the straight truth. I want to know if you was astonished."

"Well, if you *will* have it, 'Drew.'" Dill was kicking a tuft of grass with the toe of his brogan and attentively inspecting the operation. "If you insist on it, I must admit that I was surprised. Yes, I was. It was the last thing on earth that I looked for. You see, I'd plumb give up. I was expectin' to be shot. I don't know whether

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I'd closed my eyes or not; maybe I did; I don't know. It was an awful minute, I tell you. It is a serious thing all at once to be hurled out o' life to face your Maker, an' I—"

"So you was *surprised*, eh?" Merlin interrupted, testily. "I don't see what thar was in what I said to surprise you so very much. Now study a minute—think back. What *was* it that I promised?"

"Why, you know what you promised, 'Drew.'" Dill was now staring perplexedly at his friend as if doubting his sanity. "You agreed to fight for the Confederacy, and as long as *you* promised of course thar was nothing for *me* to do but to—"

"I did nothing of the sort," Merlin insisted. "You see, if you will remember, in his hurry to get away under that sudden call, Buck wasn't as accurate in his talk as he might have been. He just used the word 'enlist,' and before I told 'im what I'd do I said to myself, I did, that I'd enlist, but it would be with the Union. Now, as I see it—or *want* to see it—Mart, I wasn't telling a lie. I never intended to shoulder arms ag'in' my own State and blood kin here at home, but I was driv' to it to-night. To tell you the truth, I didn't care a red cent whether Buck let me off or not. You say you was ready to die; well, I was, too. In fact, I didn't expect anything else till Buck happened to use that one word; then I saw our chance."

"Oh, I see— Then—then—"

"I've made up my mind, Mart, to go on into East Tennessee and join some Union squad. You can do as you like. I've decided on my actions. You see, I've promised to enlist, and I've got to do it under some flag or other."

"I'm goin' to stick to you, 'Drew,'" Dill answered, in a tone of relief, "an' I'll tell you now that a little white lie like the one you told wouldn't bother me a minute."

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"Well, it will me—*some*," Merlin answered, "and I wish we could 'a' got loose some other way, but I'm going to try to keep from thinking about it. We've got a big duty before us, Mart."

"That's a fact," Dill agreed, and they began to trudge toward Tennessee.

PART II

CHAPTER I

IT was shortly after the battle of Chickamauga, two years later, a crisp morning in November. Along the mountain road which led down to Delbridge, and within a mile of the village, laboriously limped a one-legged man. He wore the long, blue regulation overcoat of the Federal Army and the blue woolen trousers and cap. On his bending back were strapped the knapsack and canteen of a private. The artificial leg, which was a poor companion for his sound one, was a rough wooden peg with an iron ferrule and a leather pad where it met the joint of what had once been a knee. The clumsy limb was held to the thigh by strong straps of leather. The pedestrian was bearded in full. His hair was long, sprinkled with gray, and unkempt; but his tanned skin was clear, and his eyes twinkled cheerfully.

Presently he reached a point on the mountain road from which he could see the village spread out in the valley below, and he stood shading his eyes with his hand and carefully studying it.

"Why, it is as dead as a graveyard!" he muttered, sadly. "It looks like thar hain't one livin' thing left in it, no smoke from any chimney that I kin see, unless that is some from my house. Yes, thank the Lord, that is smoke from the kitchen. I reckon most o' the other folks refugeed further South when our men come this way. Lord! Lord! and I don't even know who's alive at home, and who hain't! If they've managed to live these days they've done wonders."

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Down the incline, under the stark boughs of the leafless trees, he limped. Presently in the wood on his right he heard the sound of an ax, and on the side of the way ahead of him he saw a shackly one-horse wagon to which was attached a gaunt, ill-fed mule. As he drew near to it a negro emerged from the underbrush of young pines bearing a stick of wood on his shoulder. It was Cato, one of the Preston slaves, and as he lowered his stick to the wagon he stared curiously at the lame man.

"Hello, Cato! Don't you know me?" the pedestrian asked, with a smile.

Cato, still staring, slowly shook his bare, kinky head. "No," he said, coldly, "I don't know yer—I 'ain't never seed you befo', as I knows of."

"Good Lord! I wonder if I'm changed as much as all that!" the other laughed. "Say, take a close look—now you know me, I reckon."

"Good Lawd! Dat you, Marse Merlin?" and seeing the white man's extended hand, Cato came around the mule and put his own into it, after which he stood dubiously eying the wooden leg, the blue uniform, the hair-masked face.

"The first thing I want to find out from you, Cato," Merlin said, a catch of fear in his throat, "is this. You see, I hain't heard from home since I left, over two years ago, an' I want to ax if my folks are well an' still at our old place."

"Yas, suh; oh yas, suh; dey still dar, or was de las' time I seed um. You know dey don't come over ter we-all's, en we-all don't go over dar, even ter borrow any little cookin' thing we is out of."

"Thank God, they are safe!" Merlin said to himself. Then he glanced at the wagon and said, aloud: "Are you goin' to haul in a heavy load? You see, I thought you might give a feller a lift. You may not believe it, Cato, but pushin' along a thing like this," indicating his peg-leg

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and smiling, "is harder work than shovin' a turnover plow uphill through snaggy soil. I've walked about ten miles since daybreak."

Cato glanced uneasily toward the village, and then his shifting eyes came slowly back to the grizzled, expectant face. He cleared his throat, made a pretense of placing the log more securely on the wagon, and finally shook his head.

"It's like dis, Marse Merlin," he said, frankly. "You see, it hain't *my* wagon en it hain't *my* mule, en ef you *mus'* know de trufe, ole mis' would have er conniption fit ef she seed er blue-coat in her wagon. She 'u'd set fire ter it—she sho would, en it's all we got ter haul in now. De Yankees stole everything we had. Never would er saved dis wagon fum de scamps ef we hadn't th'owed it away in de swamp befo' de war. As fer dis mule, dat Yankee forage-captain lef' it on we-all's han's. 'Twas dyin' en wouldn't budge er inch. He said we-all could skin it en tan its hide fer shoe-leather. We-all physicked it en fetched it eround. Ole mis' say it's er good bargain, dough, 'kase it is too weakly t' eat much, en we hain't got nothin' ter give it, nohow."

"I see." Merlin turned to the animal's head and stroked its face gently. "Say, muley, old boy," he laughed, dryly, "both of us have been doing army duty, and we are both purty badly battered. We ought to be friends. I won't add to your load to-day. Well, good-by, Cato. I'll walk on. Huh!" he said to himself, as he limped on his way. "I lost my leg helpin' to free that black scamp, and he refuses to let me ride a little piece in his wagon. That's gratitude for you."

To reach his old home, Merlin had to pass through the once busy Square. It was wholly deserted now. All the stores, shops, warehouses, and offices were closed, except in some cases where the doors had been torn away from the empty, dust-filled buildings. The court-house was open and now never used. The near-by jail had been

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burned and only the leaning brick walls remained. As he hobbled along what had been the most popular residential street he saw no sign of the occupancy of the houses. The only visible suggestions of life, as he drew near his old home, were the wisps of blue smoke rising from a chimney of the Preston residence and from that of his own kitchen. As he passed the Preston gate he saw two female forms come out on the veranda and stare at him curiously. He noticed some negroes emerge from their cabins and stand staring, also.

"I'm a quar varmint, in their sight, I reckon," Merlin said, musingly. "I don't want to rub their trouble in on 'em with these blue togs, but I didn't have anything else to put on, and I couldn't have passed through the lines dressed any other way."

He found that the paling fence which had surrounded his house had been torn away, it having been used for firewood by the Northern soldiers who had encamped near-by. Even the front door-steps were gone, an inverted soap-box taking their place, and up which he had some difficulty lifting his cumbersome leg. There was no one in sight. At the closed door he paused. It struck him as being an odd thing that he should rap at his own door, as a stranger might have done, and yet he found himself doing it and waiting for a response.

It was this formality that kept his daughter, when she appeared, from at once recognizing him, altered though he was by his beard, massive overcoat, and missing leg. As it was, she held the door partly ajar and peered out questioningly.

"What is it that you wish?" she began, but he checked her.

"Don't you know me, Anne?" he faltered, huskily, his face filled with a fathomless yearning. His canteen rattled against the buttons of his coat as he stood quivering in agitation.

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She stared at him from her sweet eyes, now deep-set in an older face which had become drawn and attenuated from lack of proper nourishment; then crying out, "Oh, father!" she threw herself into his arms and clung to him. He felt her frail form trembling and held her from him for a moment.

"Why, what's wrong, child?" he asked, his whole being shaken to its core.

"We thought you might—might have died," she sobbed. "Mr. Dill sent us word by a Union soldier on a furlough that you were laid up badly wounded at Chattanooga. When Mr. Dill left with the army for Atlanta he said you were not expected to live, on account of blood-poisoning."

"They saved what you see left of me by cutting my leg off," he said, lightly, as he thumped the floor with the tip of his peg.

"Oh, father, father!"—she was weeping freely now—"to think that they should send you home like this!"

"Better than leaving me up there amongst the dead ones, without a mark to my grave," he said, consolingly. "Don't let this leg bother you, child. It ain't nice to look at, but I'm getting so that I can swing it purty lively. Whar's your mother and Bob?"

Before replying she led him into the sitting-room, gave him a rocking-chair, and took his overcoat, knapsack, and canteen and laid them on the table. It was as if she had lost the power of speech. Presently she answered:

"Mother is up in her room with Mrs. Dill. She was lying down just now. It is all Mrs. Dill and I can do to keep her cheered up. She is very unhappy. Grandfather came one day, a week or so before the Yankees passed. He left a ham of meat and a peck of meal. He had heard how short we were on rations. He wouldn't come in the house, but sent word in to mother. She was too sick that day to leave her bed. He said that he and grandma were going to refugee to South Georgia with some more Rebels,

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burned that he was willing to take us all with them, if we'd hobb, but—but you understand, father?"

tia "I—I think I do, daughter." Merlin gulped, and stead-Tied his voice as he finished. "What did your mother say to that?"

"Bob wasn't at home, and she couldn't make up her mind right off," Anne resumed. "She kept grandpa waiting so long outside that he got impatient and stormed about a lot. Finally he told me to tell her that he was going to spend the night at the hotel—it was open then—and for her to send word the next morning what she was willing to do."

"I see—I see." Merlin's eyes were taking in his daughter's sad appearance—the tattered large-checked linsey dress without collar or ornament at the neck, the poor run-down shoes, which, gaping at the toes, displayed the plain home-knitted stockings. "Well, well, an' what did your mother finally decide?"

"We were up all night—Bob didn't get home till just before daylight. He was out at Uncle Tom's, visiting Cousin Fred. Those two have formed a great liking for each other. Bob is out there to-day. He went to go bird-hunting, and said he'd bring some home to mother to-night. You want to know what mother did? At first, she wanted to go, it seemed, but Bob wasn't willing. He said it looked like running from the Yankees, and he didn't want to do it. He had another reason, too, but there is no use talking about that. He is influenced by Cousin Fred and Aunt Alice—you may as well know that now, father. They don't notice me or mother, but they are very nice to Bob."

"I think I can guess why," Merlin sighed. "That is one way of retaliating ag'in' a feller, ain't it? But what did *you* want to do about going with your grandpa?"

Anne hesitated. He repeated his question. He leaned toward her dumbly, insisting with his all but bloodshot

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eyes. Presently she answered, her frail form taking on a certain hauteur, her young voice ringing with a weary sort of defiance. "I refused to go," she said. "It would have meant leaving Mrs. Dill here alone, for she wasn't asked to go. It would have meant that I was afraid of ill-treatment at the hands of the army you joined. I told mother she could go if she wished. She had a talk with Bob. He refused, and the next day we sent word to grandpa that we would remain. He was furious, and went away without saying good-by—sent word that he never wanted to see us again."

"All that comes with war," Merlin said. He seemed to have drawn himself in, as if to dodge the brunt of what he dreaded more than the shells which so recently had burst about him. "Did you ever find out why Bob didn't want to go?"

Again Anne hesitated. Again he urged her, his kindly, facile lips quivering sensitively.

"I can't fully understand him, father," she said, presently. "You know how he was before you left in regard to your views. He is even worse now. You must be prepared for that. He has been with Aunt Alice and Fred so much that he is as rabid as they are. The news of Uncle Tom's promotion—he is a brigadier-general now—set him on fire with pride. He can scarcely talk of anything else."

"But you are gittin' away from Bob's reasons for not wantin' to refugee with his grandparents. Don't be afraid to talk, Anne; I can stand anything these times."

"Fred is talking of—of enlisting, as soon as they will let him," was Anne's reluctant answer. "He has written to Uncle Tom, and Bob wants to go with him. They are now waiting to be called."

Merlin, as he stared, was seen to shudder. He started to speak, but failed to do so. For several minutes there was silence between him and his daughter. Presently he said: "Yes, Anne, I must, as you say, be prepared for a

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change in Bob. Your uncle and me seed things just opposite; why shouldn't me and my son do the same? Young as he is, Bob has his political rights and freedom of opinion, and I reckon I must respect 'em. A person coerced is never good for anything. But, la me! I'd hate to part with the boy in just that sort of way! I didn't know that I loved him as much as I do. It used to come over me in them long marches and in my lonely life in a tent. Daughter, if you ever have a child, and it grows up to the age of accountability, you will know some things about the mystery of life that you don't dream of now. The strangest things don't pertain to the flesh as much as they do to the heart and soul of a human being. I wonder if your ma knows I am down here?"

"No, they didn't hear your knock, I'm sure," Anne hastened to inform him. "I was at that window there, and saw you come down the street. Shall I go up now and tell her?"

"Yes, you might as well," Merlin said. "Maybe I'd better not try to climb the steps just yet. I'd make a terrible racket, and it might sorter shock 'er to—to see me like this all of a sudden."

CHAPTER II

WITHOUT a word of comment on his remark, Anne left the room. She returned presently.

"They were both astonished when I told them," she announced. "They are coming right down."

The next act of Anne's was significant. She had brought from her room a broken horn comb and a semblance of a hair-brush, and she began to try to put his tangled hair and beard in order. He read her thoughts, and said, with a timid flush: "I wanted to get a trim-up and a shave before I got here, but didn't have any shears or razor. I struck one old Reb farmer on the road yesterday, and when I told him what I wanted he fairly snorted. He looked at my leg and said that I'd already been trimmed to his taste some, and that no tool of his should ever touch the hair of a Yankee with a Georgia twang to his talk. I was a fool to come home yet awhile, I reckon," Andrew sighed, "but I just couldn't keep away after I got my discharge and I knowed I was so nigh."

His wife was coming now, and he started to rise, but his daughter stopped him. "Stay in your chair," she urged. "You are tired out."

She saw him lift his eyes to the doorway through which her mother was to come, and in their depths she detected an incongruous, almost cowed expression. The meeting was an odd one. Ruth, looking much older than when he had left her, shambled feebly into the room. There was no suggestion on her part of excitement or joy at the sight of him. On the contrary, it was as if his uniform, his

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wooden leg, his uncouth hair and beard, had become vague obstacles to all that was left of her once refined affection for him. She was pale and haggard; her hair was becoming thin and was too tightly twisted on the back of her head. Her dress was from the same piece of linsey as Anne's. Her shoes were new, heavy enough for a man at field-work, and they squeaked when she walked toward him, her thin, blue-veined hand extended almost awkwardly.

"You didn't expect to see me get back slashed up like this, did you, Ruth?" he said, forcing a smile, as he took her limp hand, held it for a dubious instant, and then let it slip from his clasp.

"Oh, I didn't know what to expect," she answered, despondently. "Nothing surprises me now." Then turning to her daughter, as if anxious to change the subject, she asked, "Has Bob come back yet?"

"No, mother; he won't be home till late. He is always late, you know."

"I'm always afraid when he is out hunting." Ruth was taking a seat some distance from her husband's chair and smoothing out the stiff folds of her coarse skirt. "I'm afraid he will accidentally shoot himself. He is so reckless and down-hearted here lately; he doesn't seem to care whether he lives or dies. I thought my life, as a girl, was hard, but it wasn't half as hard as Bob's. I had the respect of my neighbors and was considered as good as any of the rest in the community, but Bob hasn't had a single friend since you went off except his cousin Fred. He wants to be out there all the time, and I can't blame 'im."

"No, I wouldn't, either," Merlin faltered. "If he gits pleasure out of it I say let him git it. The longer I live the more I want to see young folks happy, my own children 'specially. You see, Ruth, what we are goin' through now, or just as bad, may lie ahead o' them, an' it would

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be a pity for 'em to have misery at both ends o' life, wouldn't it?"

Anne left them to themselves and went to join Mrs. Dill, who, lingering in the kitchen, was subduing her curiosity to see Merlin at once, under the thought that the pair would have many private things to say to each other.

"I don't like the way your ma acts," she remarked, as Anne sat down beside her.

"How do you mean?" Anne asked, listlessly.

"Why, the way she took the news that your pa was back, an' not dead after all. That ain't natural, Anne. I know she's been through a lot—her ma an' pa goin' off that way, Bob's threats to leave, an' all—but that oughtn't to make her do this way. Lord! if dear old slow-goin' Mart was to come back beat up like that I'd fall at his feet an' kiss the soles o' his shoes! It is strange—strange! but women are as different as day and night."

While she was speaking, Mrs. Dill had risen and was standing at a window, looking out. "I declare," she suddenly exclaimed, "your ma is out at the gate. I reckon she is lookin' for Bob, as usual. She has already quit talkin' to your pa. Don't look like they had much to say to one another, does it? I'll go in and see 'im. He can't give me any news about Mart but I want to hear what he has to say."

It was dusk when Robert returned. Anne met him at the front door. He was tall, strongly built, and quite handsome. His clothing was made of home-woven jeans—a dark-brown and white mixture of cotton and wool. Late as it was in the season, he wore a straw hat such as were plaited by the slaves on the plantations. He put down his empty game-bag and stood staring in silence after his sister had told him of his father's return and his lamed condition.

"He's in the dining-room," Anne went on. "For

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Heaven's sake, be careful how you talk. Take pity on him. He is not happy."

Robert still stood staring for a moment in sullen silence, then in a bitter tone he jerked out: "I don't want to see him—I don't, that's all. I don't!"

"Be ashamed of yourself!" Anne's voice seemed to sink under a wave of fresh despair. "Remember he is your father. He gave life to you."

"Huh! and made it what it is!" the boy flashed back, angrily. "I'd never treat children as he has treated us all along. What has he done for you or me or mother? Ask yourself that question. Look around you. He comes home like this, to a place like this, in the uniform of the cutthroat murderers who have robbed us of all we had. I heard of a crippled Yankee soldier passing the mill to-day. I didn't know who it was, but even the negroes laughed at him. My father comes home like that, when last month Uncle Tom came home while I was there and everybody was throwing their hats in the air and yelling with joy. You'd never know the two men were brothers. One is offering his blood and breath for his country—the other is— Oh, God! I don't want to see him—I don't, and I won't!"

He was turning toward the stairs to go up to his room, and in sheer dismay Anne attempted to stop him, but he tore his arm from her frail grasp and went on.

"Bob—brother Bob!" she began calling, appealingly, after him; "wait, listen to me!"

"'Sh! Let 'im alone, daughter." It was her father standing in the doorway of the sitting-room, hidden by the darkness. "I heard what he said, an' I'll have to grin an' bear it. Under some circumstances a father has a sort o' right to exact obedience of a son to his will, but I hain't got that right in Bob's case, although he is under age. Thar ain't no law an' order now, nohow. Mark you this, Bob has inherited some o' your grandpa's traits, some o'

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your ma's, an' maybe none o' mine. I wish it could be different—I wish he had come to me of his own accord and at least said howdy, but he don't want to talk to me, and he must not be urged. Say, Anne, child, your ma's altered a powerful sight, ain't she—now, ain't she?"

"Do you think so, father?" She felt her throat tightening, and she coughed, as she slid a would-be comforting hand into his.

"Yes, awfully, daughter. When you left us alone just now neither of us seemed able to think of anything proper to say, though reason would tell us thar was a good deal to talk about. She made me feel strange, I admit it. She made me feel ashamed of my uniform and this leg, and I hain't felt that way for a long time. I say '*ashamed*,' but I don't mean that exactly, either—I used the word because no better one comes to mind. I will say, though, that I feel, somehow, that a man's reward for doing what he thinks is right ought to be different. I wouldn't mind shot and shell, or the punch of a bayonet in the hands of a boy in gray, but this—" His voice suddenly broke and she felt his arm quivering.

"You oughtn't to stand here like this," she said, tenderly. "You are tired. I'll get your supper, and then you must go to bed and have a good, sound sleep. We haven't much to eat, though, father."

He sat down to a simple supper of milk and hot corn-meal mush alone at the long table in the dining-room. Overhead, on the floor of his son's room he heard the sound of feet moving about. He knew what it meant, for he had seen his wife taking his son's supper up to him on a battered tin tray. Now and then he could hear their voices.

His meal over, Merlin rose and went into the parlor, followed by Anne.

"I've been thinking," she began, slowly, facing him in the darkened room. "I'm afraid I have not been quite

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fair to brother. I must tell you something. Father, he really has been good to us in many ways. Last spring he worked in the field to make a crop every day from sunup till away after dark. He gathered a barnful of wheat and corn and was fattening some hogs he had bought with some of the wheat, but—but—" Anne's voice trailed away into silence.

"But what?" Andrew demanded. "Haven't you got any of his crop left?"

"No; the Yankees took every grain of it, also the hogs, and even the chickens."

"But not with me a Union man, and away fighting for the country, and the food was for my wife and children?"

"Mrs. Dill told them that," Anne explained, "and for a while it looked as if they would not take the things, but Cousin Fred was here, and he and brother cursed the soldiers to their teeth, told them that they were Rebels, and made them mad. Bob denied what Mrs. Dill had said and told them that he had made the crop and would not lie to save it."

"And your ma—your ma, what did she say to it?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. You know how oddly she acts at times. She simply turned up her nose and left the soldiers to do as they liked. I think that's where she began to—to—change. She cried that night, not for the loss of the supplies, but because Bob had worked so hard and had nothing left to show for it."

"I see, I see." Merlin eased his stiff body down into a chair and leaned forward, his chin in his great splaying hands. "The instinct to fight for her young is the deepest in a woman's nature."

"Your bed is ready," Anne said. "Let me help you up-stairs."

"Not yet—not quite yet," he said. "Somehow I ain't a bit tired. Do you know, when the mind is active the body rebels ag'in' rest? If I went I'd jest lie thar an' think.

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Thar's so much to ax about. How are the Prestons? I haven't heard, but I'd bet Arthur went to war."

"Yes, within a month after you left. They say he is a captain now, but we don't hear much about him. His folks don't speak to us. Since Colonel Preston was killed they have acted like insane women. The negroes shouted and sang when the Yankees took our stuff, and even called out insulting things over the fence for us to hear."

Merlin sighed, but made no comment; then, presently, sighing again, he said, "Well, I might as well go to bed, if you'll be so kind as to show me whar I'm to lie."

"*So kind*," she bitterly repeated within herself as she led him to the stairs. "What made him say that, unless he feels that even I consider him an intruder? Oh, God, have pity on him—have pity—have pity!"

As they were turning to the stairs, in the darkened hall, they saw Robert coming down. Father and son met face to face.

"Howdy do, Bob?" Merlin greeted him, Anne thought, timidly and even appealingly, as he extended his hand. "I was wondering if you was going to come speak to a feller. I know purty well how you feel about the war, and my part in it, too; but, while we disagree, we ought not to actually hate each other. I've seed Rebs and Yanks meet after a hot battle and act like old friends tried and true. Surely me and you ought to be able to do the same, here in the house whar you was born."

Reluctantly the youth gave his hand to his father. "Howdy do?" he muttered, stiffly. There was a pause, and then, as if anxious to escape an embarrassing situation, Robert passed on.

As she helped her father ascend the stairs, Anne heard him saying, as if to himself: "What a great big strapping, fine feller he is! And they took his crop, too. Poor boy!"

CHAPTER III

ONE morning Anne was with her father on the veranda when they noticed a wagon drawn by a mule passing along the street. It was driven by Cato, who walked along at its side, and was the same poor vehicle that Merlin had already seen. The wagon had some boards on it that supported a mattress on which lay a soldier in gray who seemed asleep or too ill to sit erect. Presently from the gate of the Preston place dashed Mary Preston and her mother, their heads uncovered.

"Who is it? Who is it?" Mrs. Preston cried, excitedly.

The wagon was now opposite their own gate, and Anne and her father heard the negro answer: "He ain't dead, mis'. Don't git scared; de doctor at de crossroads say he gwine to come out all right. He des weak fum ridin' so fur, over sech rough roads."

At this the man in the wagon sat up. It was Arthur Preston. His right arm was in a sling, his face was pale to a greenish tint, and so thin that his high cheek-bones threw shadows into the hollows beneath them. As his eyes swept toward his mother and sister, he caught sight of Anne, and with his free hand he politely tipped his soiled and faded cap. Andrew saw her nod in a bewildered way, and then she turned her back to the wagon and the women who had run to meet it. A strange look as of fear and pain combined lay on her face.

"I'm all right. Don't get excited!" Arthur was assuring them, in a quivering voice. "I have only a slight wound, and the colonel sent me home for a rest. I was slow

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getting through the Federal lines, but I made it all right. I was glad to run across Cato at the mill. I'd have had to stay all night there if I hadn't, and, of course, I was crazy to get home."

The wagon moved on to the Preston gate. The two spectators saw Cato and Mrs. Preston help the lamed officer down to the ground by the aid of a chair which Mary brought from the house.

"My Lord! it's tough any way you look at it!" Merlin said to Anne, as the little group disappeared behind the cedars in the yard. "I sorter liked the way he saluted you, daughter—that's the way a true soldier acts. He must 'a' seed my blue garb alongside o' you, but it made no odds to him. In his eyes you are a lady an' deservin' of respect, no matter who you are akin to."

"You mustn't talk that way—you mustn't any more!" Anne demanded, almost sharply.

"I can't help it sometimes," he answered, bitterly. "Not of late years have I axed anything of the Almighty just for *myself* alone, but I never lie down or rise these days without beggin' him to care for my wife an' children; an' right now I feel that I am standin' betwixt you an' your natural rights. In this community you can never be like other girls as long as I am above ground. I used to think that the Lord favored the right side in a war, but I don't think so now. It seems to me that he loves both sides alike in this present mix-up. It's just his children a-fussin' over a trifle, an' he wants 'em to quiet down."

From the negroes on the Preston place Mrs. Dill learned that the newly arrived officer was doing as well as could be expected, and she brought the news to the Merlins. On pleasant days Arthur sat wrapped in comfortables and shawls in the sunshine against the house, and Anne saw him sometimes reading, sometimes smoking, sometimes asleep. One day, when she had to take in some things she

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had been washing and left on a line to dry, he saw her, and with his cap in his hand, his arm still in a sling, he rose and came toward her. Her first impulse was to turn away, but he called to her gently, insistently, pleadingly.

"I want to see you, Anne, *just a moment!*" he urged. "Will you let me speak to you?"

Her arms were full of sheets and pillow-cases, and so he did not offer to shake hands, but stood looking at her wistfully.

"You say you wish to see me?" she asked, her mind upon the humiliating fact that his mother and sister were without doubt observing them from a window.

"Yes, Anne," he said. "It is about your brother Bob."

"About Bob?" she echoed.

"Yes. He came over to see me yesterday—to ask my advice, and I do not feel that I am capable of giving it. How thin you are, Anne, and—and altered! You look very serious and troubled. Is your father getting along well? You see, I know how you love and admire him."

"He is very well, thank you." Anne had colored slightly. To him it seemed that the new lines of care in her face, the wounded depths of her eyes, had heightened her former beauty. "Haven't I asked you not to—to humiliate me by speaking to me when your people object so strongly to it?"

"I remember—oh, I remember that!" he sighed. "But at a time like this I have a right to oppose even them. If they are unreasonable I don't have to be. They are half insane, Anne. The death of my father, the slight wound I got, and the loss of all our means have almost dethroned their reason. But don't worry about my speaking to you now. I told them that I must see some one of your family, and they agreed that it would be best."

"See us about what?" she inquired.

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"Your brother," Arthur answered. "He wants to join our troops, and wants me to help him get through the Union lines to my company. Of course, knowing how you and your father feel, I could not advise him, though in a way it is my official duty to encourage his enlistment. The South needs all the men it can get—old and young. We are taking boys even younger than Bob. Our fair land is in terrible straits. A great crisis is on us. We are short of supplies. We have little more left than our undying courage. How it is to end only God knows."

"It can end only one way," Anne said, with spirit. "My father said so from the beginning, and because he tried to save the South from the mistake it is making he is being crucified—that is the word—*crucified*! He is a Christian. He believed in peace, and would not have fought even for the Union if he hadn't been forced to do so at the price of his life and honor."

"We mustn't argue about it, Anne," Preston said, gently. "I can dispute with others on this subject, but not with *you*. You can't help being as you are. If it were not for the love you bear your father, you would have been just like my mother and sister and other women of the South. But I do want you to understand that I have not influenced Robert at all."

"Do you think he will go?" Anne asked, almost as if that calamity itself had borne down the barriers between her and Arthur.

"I am afraid—on your account—that he will, and very soon; and you would rather have him stay at home, is that it, Anne?"

She gave him her eyes frankly, piteously, helplessly. "I am not thinking of his danger alone," she answered. "I am thinking of the effect his going will have on my father. Do you know what all you people will say? You will say that he did it to make restitution for my father's shortcomings. Bob has already said that. If he goes, I

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shall never be able to look upon him as a brother again. No insult could cut my father so deeply as that. He loves Bob with all his big, yearning, suffering heart."

"I see what you mean." Arthur's voice sank and quivered. "Anne, I am not one of those who fail to appreciate your father. His relation to you may have something to do with it, as well as his whole-souled kindness to me as a boy; but still I think he is really a great man. Nobody but a great man could stand as firmly for a principle as he has done and is doing. If I thought he'd care to see me I'd ask permission—"

"No, you must not," Anne objected. "Your mother and sister would run from you as if you had been in contact with a loathsome disease."

"Oh, well!"—Arthur shrugged his thin shoulders; his wounded arm shook in its sling and he winced with pain—"never mind, then. But I'll bet if we do meet, though, we'll understand each other. Men who have breathed the smoke of battle, waded through streams of human blood, and heard the cries and last prayers of dying friends and foes—well, they are not open to resentment, Anne. It is those who stay at home and brood over it all who hate and harbor ill-will. Give him a message for me, will you?" The young officer was smiling now. "Tell him that I am aware of the fact that I am in his power and that I do not ask for mercy or expect it at his hands. Tell him that I'll abide by any decision he makes."

"In his power?" Anne repeated, mystified.

"Yes." Arthur was still smiling. "You see, I'm inside the Federal lines now, Anne. I got home only by the greatest difficulty, and if my presence here were known I'd be captured and removed at once. You see, in a sense it is your father's duty to report me. It lies with him altogether."

"How absurd!" Anne cried, incredulously.

"It is quite true, nevertheless," he answered, gravely.

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"War is war, you know, and I am really on your father's bounty."

"I am going to tell him that you are here and want to see him, then," Anne said, in a softened tone. "Wait and I'll send him out. But—but when you see him, please—please don't—" her voice failed and she stood silent.

"Don't what, Anne?"

She had turned away; her voice was muffled by the things in her arms, which almost touched her lips.

"Don't tell him about Bob. My brother may, after all, change his mind and not go."

"All right. I understand, Anne."

She found her father alone in the sitting-room at the open fireplace in which some logs were burning, and when she had told him of Preston's presence in the yard he rose and thumped out of the house. She stood at a window, and peering out cautiously, she witnessed the meeting of the two soldiers. An arm was helpless, a leg was gone, and yet they met, clasped hands, and smiled as if there was humor in their plight.

CHAPTER IV

COMING into the sitting-room the next morning near noon, Merlin saw his wife bending over some of Robert's underclothing which she was mending. Her back was turned to him and he could not see her face. Suddenly he heard a stifled sob escape her lips, and then noticed a Confederate knapsack lying at her feet. His eyes wide with dumb inquiry, he moved to her side and, with the apologetic attitude which had been his since his return, he stood looking down on her.

"What's the matter? What's this?" indicating the knapsack.

She did not look up, seemed to be making an effort to suppress her emotion, but suddenly raised a tattered undershirt to her face, held it there, and burst into tears. He found himself unable to meet the situation and went to a window and stood waiting for her tears to subside. She was rising to leave the room, had gathered the things in her arms, when he turned to her.

"Won't you tell me what's the matter, Ruth?" he asked, more resolutely, and yet with vast tenderness.

"You know, or ought to know," she sobbed. "Bob is going to the war. His cousin Fred is leaving in the morning. They are going together and you—you are responsible for it!"

"Me, Ruth?" he faltered. "Surely you—"

"Yes, *you!*" the words were shot at him as from sheer exploding grief. "He has always been a harmless, peace-loving child, as gentle as a lamb. Young as he is, he never

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would go to war, but you drove him to it. He says he's going to take your place—and do what he can to make up for your traitorous conduct. He says he wants to kill as many Yankees as you have Southerners."

"To take my place!" Merlin echoed. His wilting lips moved as if to frame a desperate protest, but no sound came from them. Ruth had reached the door. He wanted to detain her. He would have sprung forward to prevent her going, but his wooden leg seemed screwed to the floor.

He was at the window, a rigid spectator of the emptiness in the street, when Robert came in at the front door and started up the stairs to his room. He was carrying a parcel under his arm, and through a slit in the old newspaper wrapper Merlin caught sight of a bit of gray cloth. He afterward learned that Robert that day had walked several miles in the country to get the uniform of a young soldier who had died while at home on a furlough. Andrew heard his son's step on the floor above, and decided that he would go up and see him. Never, it seemed to him, had he faced a graver moment or asked for audience of a more impressive personage.

It was a laborious ascent; he was trying to do it silently, but he finally, quite out of breath, arrived at the open door of the room he was seeking. Robert stood before a mirror, trying on the uniform. The trousers were too short, the coat too tight, but a certain look of satisfaction was on the boy's face as he glanced up and saw his father in the doorway. Their eyes met. The novice in gray gazed on the veteran in blue; the unscarred stared at the scarred, and smiled, doggedly.

"Will you excuse me a minute if I come in?" Andrew asked. "I don't want to bother you, son, but your ma says you are going off to-morrow, and I haven't hardly had a chance to say a word to you since I got back."

"You may come in if you want to," the boy threw back, coldly; "it isn't my house."

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There was an unoccupied chair near the fireplace, and, feeling his sound leg quivering, and to hide his weakness, Merlin sank into it. Robert rolled his discarded suit up and kicked it into the closet.

"I'm through with that," he muttered. "I'd rather be buried in this, that another fellow fought in, than live in that in idleness during such times as these."

Merlin's face was a throbbing mask of agony. "I know you don't want me here, Bob," he began, pushing his peg leg out to ease the tension of the straps around his thigh, "but I just had to come. If you ever grow up to man's estate, have a son, and count on him for years with pride, you will understand my feelings. You are too young to have deep thought yet. That comes only through long experience and many sorrows. I wish, though, that I had it in my power to make you understand how unfair you are to me by having hard feelings ag'in' me for what I've done and for what I am. As I hope to be judged by the Lord God of Hosts at the great final reckoning, I can take oath right now that I never have done a thing in regard to this big national upheaval that I could possibly avoid. My conscience has always led me in *small* things, and it led me in this *big* one, too. My conscience is telling me something now that may astonish you. Bob, it is whisperin' to me at this minute that I hain't go no actual right to object to the step you are a-takin'. It seems to me that whatever a human bein' wants to do, that has courage in it, is right in God's sight. You have a right to decide as to your own conduct in this great political matter. Your ma is nearly distracted, an' she is goin' to blame me for it. That's some'n' else I've got to bear."

"What's the use to talk about it?" Robert demanded, fiercely. "The Yankees are driving our people before them like starving dogs—driving us out of our own State. You helped at it till you dropped out of the ranks. Mother told you what I said, did she? Well, I meant it. I know

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you were wrong, and I want to do what I can to offset it, as my cousins and uncle are doing."

Merlin's shaggy head sagged downward as if to ward off the blows from the fresh young enemy in front of him. "I know what you mean," he gulped. "You might be more gentle about it, an' maybe you would be if you was not havin' your own troubles, but you have a right to your views. I pray to God that he will bring you through safe an' sound. You will be fightin' ag'in' the side I was on, but I won't be sorry to hear it if you fight bravely—in fact, Bob, I'll be proud. After all is said and done you'll have such great men as Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson to follow, and they will be glad to shake your hand if I never get to do it ag'in. Don't imagine that I don't reverence such men, for I do. I don't feel hard ag'in' your uncle, either. When I was lying up thar at Chattanooga, and they told me I was likely to die of blood-poisoning, I thought a lot about him, and it seemed to me that I loved him more than I used to. I didn't know but that he was lyin' in his own blood som'er's on the field, an' maybe thinkin' about old times like I was."

"What's the use of talking?" Robert repeated, as he moved impatiently toward the door. "Talking won't alter things. I'm going in the morning. I know how to get through the lines, I think. If I'm shot trying, I won't care."

"Well, I have said all I can think to say," Merlin said, rising as his son left the room. His own chamber was across the hall, and he went into it and sat down on the bed. With his hands locked in front of him, he remained still for several minutes. Presently he exhaled a deep breath and muttered:

"I've got Anne left. She won't leave me—sweet child, she is as true as steel—but, oh! I wanted the *other* two! I wanted 'em—I wanted 'em!"

CHAPTER V

IT was a dismal household after the departure of the young soldier. News came back by word of mouth that he had safely crossed the lines of the Federal Army. News came, too, of the frequent battles, the enormous number of lives lost on both sides, and of the constant and sagacious retreating of the Confederates, closely followed by their foes.

Ruth Merlin, an ominous shadow of her former self, moved about as if in a dream. She seldom spoke to Anne or Mrs. Dill, constantly maintaining a frigid resentment against them as being vaguely associated with her disaster. Mrs. Dill could influence her, however, more than Anne. She would perhaps not have taken necessary nourishment but for Mrs. Dill's subtle and good-humored persuasion.

"You got to keep alive," she used to say, "to meet your soldier son when he comes home. He'll be back with the balance, Ruth, don't you fear; the Lord won't take that fine boy on top o' all your other troubles."

One of the commodities which could not be obtained by the Merlins and their neighbors was salt. And when they had been without it for a month or more, Merlin surprised Anne and Mrs. Dill by saying that he thought he might be able to secure some. He spoke of having heard that the earth beneath old smoke-houses was being dug up and the salt extracted by a simple process of evaporation. His hearers were incredulous and stood by watching him as he worked with a pick and shovel in the smoke-house behind the kitchen.

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"You can't handle those heavy tools," Anne protested. "You are in no fix to bend over so much."

"I don't have to bend so very much," he smilingly explained. "See I've got around that by puttin' in extra-long handles. You let me alone. This is more fun than goin' a-fishin'."

When he had dug up and shoveled out as much as two or three cart-loads of the salt-saturated earth, he made some tubs by sawing in two several molasses-barrels which had been stored in the barn. Filling the tubs with water, he stirred the earth into it, and when the earth had settled at the bottom he poured off the water into some big iron pots which he had for use in killing hogs. Beneath the pots he made fires, constantly jesting with his observers.

"The water will boil away," he explained, "and leave the crystal salt at the bottom."

The experiment turned out well, and for many days the crippled man had something to occupy his mind besides his domestic worries and the constant, almost morbid fear that something serious might befall his son.

The news of his salt-making spread through the almost depopulated village and countryside, and persons badly in need of salt came, bringing produce to exchange for it, and from these visitors the Merlins learned all the news that was obtainable from the fields of warfare.

One cold day Mrs. Dill came to Merlin as he sat in the sunshine on the warm side of the house.

"I want to say somethin' to you," she began, a frank stare in her eyes, "an' I must admit that it ain't my business. I was just a-wonderin', 'Drew, since you are here in the middle o' so many Confederate folks, if it hain't sort o' rubbin' it in to keep on that blue suit. As I understand it, uniforms are meant to wear when a body is doin' military duty an' not to be flaunted like a rag before a bull in the face o' sufferin' people."

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"You may be right," Merlin admitted, "but the trouble is, Mandy, that I hain't got no other clothes to put on. But now I come to think of it, I could wear the suit Bob throwed away."

"It would be better than what you got on," Mrs. Dill said, and the conversation ended.

He was a man who put into rapid action all of his ideas, so he went into the house and, finding Robert's suit in a closet, he took off his blue coat, and was about to try on the one discarded by his son when Ruth suddenly appeared at the door. She stared at him as if dumfounded, and then with a shriek like that of a wounded animal she sprang at the coat and tore it from his hands.

"Haven't you a grain of sense left?" she panted. "Do you think I could stand to see you limpin' about here in my boy's clothes? You sha'n't wear 'em. They are mine—they are mine!"

With half-dumb lips he apologized, his eyes admitting her right to the sentiment she was displaying. With the clothing pressed to her breast like a woman fleeing from fire, her babe in her arms, she left him. Anne found him seated on the edge of his bed, alone. She had witnessed her mother's white-faced retreat to her own room, and had gathered enough of the affair from Mrs. Dill to understand it. She seated herself beside the silent man, and put her arm around his neck.

"Don't worry," she said. "Mother hardly knows what she is doing. You see, she has gathered everything Bob had anything to do with and keeps them in her room."

With mild eyes, in the depths of which the shadows of far-off things seemed to be moving, he stared at his daughter. "It ain't because she took the clothes from me," he said. "I don't care nothin' about that, but I'll tell you some'n' that does cut, an' that deep, Anne. Under that storm of rage, just now, I seed the awful truth. She don't love me one bit longer. If she had loved me she

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wouldn't 'a' been afeard I'd contaminate our boy's clothes. Yes, she hates me. She may not be in her right mind exactly, but she hates me. She don't know that I miss Bob every bit as much as she does—but I'll take that back; she may know it, but thinks I hain't got *the right* to miss 'im. Lord! Lord! child, the Almighty makes big demands on anybody that takes a stand in his behalf! The way up the hill to his holy throne is steep and mighty nigh too narrow for human foot to tread."

One of the persons who came to get salt was old Jimmy Webb, who, being too old and feeble to do war duty, had remained at home. He got out of his little old rattling buggy and, bent with rheumatism, toiled up the steps and rapped on the door. Anne admitted him.

"I want to see your pa," he said, crustily. "I've come to git some salt. I've fetched a piece o' side meat. If you-uns don't need it you are the only folks this side o' Yankeedom that don't."

"We need it badly," Anne said. "We have no meat at all left, and my mother's health is bad. I'll send father in."

She had offered to take his hat and the great woollen shawl which drooped from his shoulders like a tent, but he curtly refused. "I just come for the salt, an' I don't want *that* unless you want my meat every bit as bad as I want your salt."

A moment later Andrew, with a loud sound, thumped into the room. "Well, well, Jimmy, how are you?" he cried.

But after the first hasty survey of the battered man in blue, the old farmer refused to look at him, and Andrew sheepishly thrust the hand that was ready to meet that of his old friend into his pocket.

"Well, I reckon you are still ag'in' me, Jimmy," he faltered. "Well, I don't blame you a single bit. You are a-doin' your duty as you see it, and I reckon I am too."

"I can't be friendly with you, 'Drew Merlin—I can't!"

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The old man shook with suppressed rage. "What have you done to me, eh? I say, how did you pay me back for givin' you a chance to save your worthless life by betrayin' confidence ag'in' my own as I did? Why, you went straight off an' linked yourself with the damned cut-throat, thievin' Yankees, an' set in to shootin' us down as fast as you could."

"Some day I'll explain all that, Jimmy, but thar's no use tryin' it now, for you are too mad to listen."

"But you lied like a cowardly dog, when—"

"Don't say that, Jimmy!" Andrew broke in, his lip quivering. "I can't take the lie from no livin' man, old or young, sound or crippled. I know what you mean, an' I know how you heard it. Your son was in the gang that hunted me down that night, an' he went back an' told you all I said. He said I promised to enlist, didn't he? Well, I *did* say I'd enlist. They thought I meant one thing, an' I meant another. If I lied thar, let the Lord accuse me, not you or them outlaws that forced it from me."

"I hain't got nothin' more to say." Webb shook as with palsy, his brown broken teeth showing between his wind-cracked lips. "I've come to swap meat for salt. The meat is in my buggy. If you want to give me as much as a quart o' salt—"

"I'll give you a peck, Jimmy," Andrew said, in a softened tone, "an' you kin take the meat back home. I've still got dirt with salt in it. I intend to boil out some more to-morrow."

"You sell it to others, an' you'll have to to me, if I git any," Webb retorted as he fastened his shawl at the neck with its great brass clasp-pin. "I'll git the meat, an' when you've weighed it, you can give me what you like for it."

Without further parley, the exchange was made. The meat was taken, by Anne, to the kitchen, the salt put into the buggy. With great difficulty, and stoutly refusing

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to be aided by the girl, the farmer finally got into the vehicle. He took up the knotted rope reins, which lay on the back of an ill-fed horse in ragged leather harness tied together with bits of wire and twine. He struck the horse with the long hickory switch which served as a whip, and the horse had started when he suddenly drew on the reins and sat staring doggedly, first at Anne and then at Merlin.

"Forgot some'n', Jimmy?" Andrew asked. "If it's to shake hands I'm ready. If you'd seed as much blood spilt as I have, you'd realize that this life is too short for two old friends to—"

"Thar's no use to shake hands," Webb interrupted, irritably. "I didn't intend to mention it. A man that will do as you did hain't to be trusted, an' you may go an' use this information ag'in' us as you did the other. I say you may do it. I don't want to tell you—I want to see you worse punished than you have been so far. You've just lost a leg, while I've lost two fine young grandsons and a brave son-in-law. His widow in her black weeds, with two helpless children, is cryin' her eyes out at my home now. I say I want you to get a bigger dose than you have got. You look too rosy and plump, an' your grin don't set well in my craw. You've got too much brass, after what's happened, but still, if I go home and don't tell you some'n' in particular, I'll bother. I don't know *why* I'll bother, but I *will*. 'Drew Merlin, did you know that Buck Walker's band is still at large in the mountains?"

"No. I thought they joined the Reb army some time back." Merlin was genuinely surprised.

"Well, they didn't," the old man went on, sullenly. "They are doin' good work gatherin' food for our needy soldiers. Well, I think they are headed this way, an'—an' if you *must* know, I'll tell you. I got it straight that he's the maddest man at you that ever straddled a hoss

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or fired a gun. Now I'm goin' home. You kin think it over. I don't care a damn cent what he does with you, if you are fool enough to get caught. Whatever medicine he gives will be deserved."

As the creaking buggy, with its wabbling wheels and loose tires, moved away, Anne and her father stood facing each other. To her surprise, for she was frightened by the gravity of the disclosure, she saw that her father was smiling.

"If I had to die," Andrew said, with a chuckle, "I'd like to have old Jimmy with me, and mad too, just like he is now. He'd cheer me up. In all the world, outside o' you, of course, he is my best friend. He's proved it to-day—he's proved it."

CHAPTER VI

AS they were about to enter the house they noticed a horse bearing a soldier in a gray uniform gallop up to the Preston gate.

"Another Reb has slipped through the lines," Merlin observed. "They find it easy in these mountains, where every house and barn will shelter 'em. This feller may be doing spy duty."

In a few minutes the soldier was seen to come out and ride away. Arthur had accompanied him to the gate, and stood looking after him.

Andrew remembered something he wanted to do at the barn, and he limped away in that direction. Presently Anne saw Arthur pass through the gate and advance toward her, something in his manner seeming to indicate that he desired to see her. She wanted to avoid him, for she feared that his mother and sister might be watching him from a window; but as she turned toward the steps she heard him calling to her. She paused and waited, wondering, as he approached, why he looked so much weaker and paler than at their last meeting. His arm was still in its large, white sling. He seemed to be agitated.

"Anne," he began, raising his cap, "I want to see your father on an important matter. Will you please ask him if I may?"

"I think he already knows what you want," she said, with a bitter smile.

"Really, Anne, does he—do you—does your mother?"

"Yes, we know that your friend Buck Walker is at work not far away, and—"

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"It is not about Buck Walker, Anne," he broke in, suddenly and most gently. "I think I'd better speak to your father. He is a man—and you and your mother being ladies, I think perhaps it would be more fit that I should—Call him, please, Anne, will you?"

"Yes, I'll call him," she answered, studying his wan face in intuitive alarm. "Will you go in and sit down, or will you wait here?"

"I'll go in, thank you," he said, glancing toward the door. "I'll wait in the parlor, if you don't mind."

She opened the front door and showed him into the big, bare room which, having no fire, was cold and cheerless. "It's warmer in the sitting-room," she said, considerate of his illness. "Will you go in there?"

"I'm not cold at all," he replied. "This will do, thank you."

Passing through the house, as the shortest way to the barn, she met her mother, who was standing listlessly at a kitchen window, looking out.

"What does Arthur Preston want?" Mrs. Merlin asked.

"He wants to speak to father," Anne returned.

"Your father? What can he want with him?"

"I don't know, mother." Anne was passing on.

"You don't know? Why don't you know?" Mrs. Merlin demanded, transferring her fixed stare to her daughter's receptive face. "Didn't you see that soldier ride up to his house and hurry away?"

"Yes, I saw him. Arthur is waiting, mother. Father is at the barn, I think."

It was as if the older woman wanted to detain her daughter, but was constrained to desist. As she left the room and closed the door to keep out the chill air, Mrs. Merlin suddenly covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, God! why do I keep thinking this awful thing?" she cried as she swung to and fro, still at the window. "Oh, it can't be *that*! It mustn't be!"

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The door opened. Anne had met her father in the yard and was leading him in. She went with him as far as the hall, noticing that her mother had silently followed to the sitting-room, where she sat down before the little wood fire, her thin features touched by the glow. Anne stood in the cheerless hall and listened to the voices in the parlor.

"Well, my boy," she heard her father say, cheerfully, "I still have to take your left hand, I see. I hope your sore is gittin' on all right. Both of us are bunged up pretty bad, ain't we? Yours is slow about healing, ain't it?"

"Yes, keeps running," Preston replied. "The doctor says he is out of the best remedies, but that I am doing as nicely as could be expected."

"Well, how is everything with you?" Merlin went on. "Food is powerful scarce with us."

Anne thought that it was significant of revelations to come that the visitor should remain silent at this obvious opening for a response. She heard her father's usual exhalation of breath and the forward sliding of his peg-leg on the floor as he sat down. She felt as if her heart were standing still as she waited for further utterances from the still room. In the pause she saw her mother's face in the flickering firelight, the inquiring eyes turned on hers. What thoughts other than those of fear could have widened and deepened them like that? Anne was sure that her mother could not hear the voices of the men, and some intuition made her content that it should be so.

"Anne said you wanted to see me about some'n' particular," Merlin now said, quite clearly.

"Yes, Mr. Merlin, I could have told her, but I thought it would be better to speak to you first. A friend brought some army news to me just now, and part of it concerns you."

"Oh, me?" Anne heard him laugh. "They are after

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me, Arthur, eh? Well, I thought they wouldn't leave me in peace long."

"No, it is nothing of that sort, Mr. Merlin; it is about Bob. It is quite serious, and—"

"Don't tell me he's been—been hurt, wounded!" Merlin gasped. "Seems to me that I couldn't stan' that!"

A cold chill passed over the spellbound girl, for a ready reply was not forthcoming. There was a pause, and a pause at such a moment could have but one import. Anne, turning her head again, saw her mother pushing a burning chip under the raised logs with the toe of her coarse shoe. It was plain that she was deaf to the tragedy that was being enacted.

"You don't speak out, Arthur, young friend!" Merlin was heard saying, in a pleading tone. "You are holding back some'n' beca'se I said—I said—but spit it out, boy! If bad news has to come, why, let it come."

"He was shot and instantly killed a week ago," Arthur said, gently. "I know how it will hurt you and your family, for we are going through the same thing at our house."

It must have been some reply acted rather than worded, Anne thought, for she heard Preston rise and make one or two steps, and then came her father's broken chest-tones as he said: "Thank you, Arthur, thank you. You are kind, boy—an' you used to like 'im, didn't ye?"

"Yes, he was brave and lovable," Arthur said. "I tried to keep him from going, Mr. Merlin. He was too young and reckless."

Anne listened no longer. She went to the fire and sat down beside its mute sentinel. They looked at each other. It was plain to the girl that her mother was battling against subtle fears when she smiled and said: "I can guess what Arthur wants, Anne. He never has been able to hide what he feels about you. Now among the kind of folks he belongs to—the old aristocratic kind—I'm

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told the men folks never take a step toward marriage without consulting the head of the family the lady belongs to. Now I have an idea that Captain Preston right now—right this minute—is telling your pa how much he's always thought o' you, an'—"

"Stop, mother! Please, please don't!" Anne's voice cracked as she took her mother's hand and drew her head to her shoulder.

With a fierce, inquiring jerk, Mrs. Merlin sat erect and all but glared at her daughter. "You don't think it's that—you don't! you don't! You listened. I saw you. You heard. You know what he came for, and are keeping it to yourself. I want you to tell me, but, God! I'm afraid o' what you'll say. I heard guns an' cannon boomin' in my sleep last night, and saw great masses of dead and dying soldiers being toted away in stench an' smoke that was stifling. Oh, oh, oh! What ails you, girl? Have you gone distracted? Talk, talk, talk! Tell me, an' be done with it!"

"Mother, come, let's go up to your room," Anne urged. She rose to her feet, caught her mother's inert hand and by sheer strength drew her up.

"To my room—my room? If my child is dead it will be to my coffin, but he *is*—he *is*! You look it. Your tongue is tied."

"Come, mother, come!"

Mrs. Merlin, staring wildly, allowed her daughter to draw her toward the rear stairs. "Tell me, tell me, fool! idiot! tell me what you know. Is he dead? Actually dead? Bobby, my baby, dead?"

"Let me have 'er, dear." It was Mrs. Dill's voice, and she approached from an outer doorway. "I know what's happened. I'll do my best to quiet her."

"You know?" Mrs. Merlin cried, allowing the older woman to put her arm about her.

"Yes, I know," catching Anne's glance and noting her

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dismal nod. "You've got to bear it, Ruth. Other women are going through the same, an' you've got to bear your part."

Anne stood aside and watched the pair slowly ascend the stairs. From a window of the sitting-room she saw Arthur leave the house. The parlor was still. Turning in to it, she descried her father in a big rocking-chair, his shaggy head lowered, his chin on his chest like a tired wayfarer asleep. She advanced to him, touched him on the shoulder. He looked up, blinking vaguely, staring gropingly, as a man waking from sleep. His eyes were bulging from their tense sockets; his skin was greenish yellow.

"Can you guess what Arthur come to tell me?" he asked.

"I know—I heard," she answered.

"And your mother—what about her?"

"She knows, too."

Something told her that he was actually not equal to the physical exertion of rising. She saw that he was shivering as from cold, and, going out, she returned with his big army overcoat, which she put over his shoulders.

"How is your mother actin'?" he faltered, still staring helplessly.

"I don't know; Mrs. Dill is with her."

"That's better," he shuddered again. "She won't want to see me or you. In my opinion, nothing under high heaven could have happened as bad as this is for her. Mark my words, it will be the last straw, Anne. She's a delicate thing, a sweet, delicate creature, an' her love for Bobby was all that kept her goin'."

Steps were heard in the sitting-room, and a voice in gentle protest against a clamorous, hysterical one. "Where are they? Where are they both? Off chuckling some'r's, I reckon, over our dead and dying soldier-boys."

Here Ruth burst into the room, her half-insane eyes singling out the blue-clothed hulk in the chair.

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"There you sit, you contemptible Yankee puppy!" she screamed. "There in your damnable garb of shame. Go to the red-handed child-murderers you belong to. If you remain here I'll leave. I will—will—will—" She was reeling, her hands outstretched. Mrs. Dill caught her in her arms and eased her down to the floor. She was unconscious.

CHAPTER VII

FOR a week following Mrs. Merlin remained in her room attended solely by Mrs. Dill, who discreetly advised Andrew and Anne not to go to her for the time being. The advice was of far-reaching and tragic import to the father and daughter. From time to time Mrs. Dill reported that the main trouble was in not getting the patient to take sufficient nourishment. One day she remarked to Anne that she was sorry there was no coffee to be had.

"You know," she added, "that your ma was a great coffee-drinker, and she misses it now. If I just could give 'er a cup of a mornin' it would do her good and maybe make her pick up. Poor thing! she don't even want to live—she's plumb done up."

That day Anne decided to make an effort to get a little coffee, regardless of the trouble involved. Her father was fond of coffee, also, but in place of it she had been giving him a drink made from parched corn or burnt sweet potatoes, which, indeed, was a poor substitute. She had heard that an old Jew, Isaac Levy, had opened a temporary store in the Square, where he kept a few staple things when it was possible to secure them from the depleted Southern markets. So she took a pillow-slip and weighed into it five pounds of salt, and getting some Confederate money from her father, she went to the Square.

In all the desolate spot Levy's door was the only one open, and in the rear of the long narrow room he stood at the end of a counter over a little stove in which wood

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was burned. The two sides of the room were flanked by shelves, but nothing at all was on them. A few bags, barrels, kegs, and boxes, grouped around the lonely dealer, contained his entire stock in trade. He was a dismal relic of former activity. He wore a ragged uniform of a Confederate private, and he smiled suavely as he saw that Anne was regarding it curiously.

"I zee, Miz Annie," he said. "I look funny, eh? De last time you saw me, when de Yankees was here, I had on de blue. I got it yet, hid under de counter. If de Yankees come I put it on, if de Rebels come I stay like I am. I'm too oldt to fight—can't see to shoot straight, but dey let me 'lone if I have on de right uniform."

He had, no doubt, heard of her brother's death and her mother's illness, but such things were of little current interest at a time when death and illness were more to be expected than health and life, and so he said nothing about them.

Anne made no reply to his jest, simply resting her bag of salt on the head of a molasses-barrel.

"Well, well," he said, disparagingly, "what you brought? Every customer brings me something nopotty needs."

"Five pounds of salt," she answered. "I want a little coffee, Mr. Levy. I must get it. My mother is sick, and craves it."

"Coffee, oh, coffee!" he raised his hands and laughed. "Everypotty wants coffee. I need your salt, too—sharp man, your fadder, wid his smoke-house trick; but I just got six pounds o' coffee in de house, an' dat was sold for cash, in gold, just five minutes ago. See, I've done it up in dis little pox. Your sick mother wants it, eh? Well, so do de pig officers in de Confederate Army. Captain Preston is out in my packyard now. Lame as he is, he's getting a pox ready to send some stuff to his colonel, if he can pass it through de lines. Hear 'im? Dat's de

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young daredevil now, hammering wid one hand in a sling, and as weak as a sick cat."

"Are you sure that's all you have?" Anne asked.

"Yes, Miz Annie—not another grain, and no more to be had from Augusta. I'll take de salt and give you money, but no coffee."

At this moment the sound of the hammer ceased. "Heigh, Isaac, in there!" Arthur Preston called out. "Have you got a marking-pot and brush?"

"De pot an' brush, Captain," the Jew called back, "put no oil to mix de lampblack. It's as dry as powder."

"Oh, the devil!" the young officer exclaimed, and, frowning impatiently, he threw down his hammer and came into the store. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" he cried, flushing. "I didn't know you were here."

Anne bowed coldly, took up the salt, and was turning away, when he advanced, his cap in hand.

"I've been wanting to find out how your mother is?" he said, most considerately. "I heard from Cato that she was ill. I am afraid my news seriously affected her."

"It is killing her," Anne answered, simply.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he cried. "It is too bad—too bad! Is there anything, Anne, that I can do to help? My services are at your disposal. Command me, Anne. I want to serve you."

She shook her head. "There is nothing, thank you," she answered. "It is kind of you, but there is nothing any one can do."

"She come to gedt coffee for her mother," the Jew put in.

"Coffee?" Preston cried, eagerly. "Why, Anne, that's exactly what I happen to have! Eh, Isaac? Open that box, old man."

"I can't take it," Anne answered, more coldly now. "Mr. Levy said you were going to send it to your colonel."

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"The other things, Anne, but not the coffee!" No man had ever lied with a holier intent, and as Preston bent toward her the desire to gain his point fairly set his young face on fire. "The idea! to think that I'd send a big, rawboned officer a luxury like coffee when gentlewomen need it! Men can't fight under the influence of coffee. It dies out, right when strength is most needed."

"I can't accept it," Anne said, firmly.

"She wanted to give salt for it." Levy was something of a diplomat, and his upward shrug and kindly tone added to the hint his words contained. "Everypotty wants salt—nothin' tastes goot widoudt salt; butter soon stinks widoudt you put it in."

"Salt? We want it at home." The captain gracefully and plausibly swung himself into the trend of his coadjutor. "We heard of your father making it, and our negroes tried it, but failed. Anne, you will do us a favor if—"

"You may do as you like with the salt," the girl said to Levy as she put it down on the counter. "Keep it; we'll get something in its place some other time."

"But the coffee, Anne?" With his one free hand Arthur drew the box containing the coffee to him. "Here, Isaac, put up all she wants. She must take it."

With a quick movement the Jew emptied the salt into a drawer, and was about to weigh up some of the green coffee-beans to put into the pillow-slip when Anne haughtily protested.

"Your mother needs it; your sister needs it; *you* need it!" she said, firmly. "Please don't say any more about it!"

"But we want the salt a great deal more," Arthur argued, desperately. "I can't take your salt, Anne, unless you will take some of this coffee. That is all there is about it."

Anne hesitated, then with a sigh—it was a half-pleased

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sigh, delivered with a little smile of defeat—she gave in. “Well, I’ll take a pound.”

“Oh, Anne, that is not enough!” Arthur protested.

“Yes, that will do, and it is very kind of you,” she added, now flushing prettily. “Remember, it is not for my father; it is not for me—it is for my mother, and she has gone completely over to your side. She’ll thank you herself, if she’s ever well again.”

A meaning glance was shot from the wan face of the young officer to that of the sympathetic Jew, and the “pound” of coffee which was put into the pillow-slip and tied up was more than double weight. With it under her arm Anne turned away, and Arthur followed her to the sidewalk.

“I wish there was something I could do,” she heard him saying, as much to himself as to her, for his concern and sincerity lay deep within him.

“There is absolutely nothing,” she answered.

“Anne,” he said, tremulously, for, brave as he was as a man and soldier, he was timid in her presence, “I realize my duty to my country, but in one way I hate the war. I hate it because it has parted you from me. We used to be friends, but now we are acting like enemies. The plight you are in, the things you are suffering, through your father’s lameness, your brother’s death, your mother’s illness, and your own lack of food, are driving me crazy. I can think of nothing else. The doctor told me last night that if I did not have more peace of mind I’d not get well enough to—” he hesitated, his impulse having caused him to say more than he intended.

“Well enough to go back and kill some more people?” she thrust into the gap. “That’s your idea of duty?”

“Let us not talk of that,” he returned, gently. “Anne, I have another trouble. I wonder if you can guess what it is, but never mind, I’ll tell you. Anne, I like your father. I admire him. He is as strong in storm as a great

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oak, and yet with his friends he is as gentle as a lamb. I said I liked him—I think I love him. It may be because you do, and it may be because he has always treated me like a son. I can't begin to tell you how his sad condition weighs upon me. The other day when I told him about Bob, and I saw him wilt like a plant under flames, the very skies, as I walked home, seemed the color and weight of lead."

"I'm glad you like him." Anne was deeply touched. "He deserves better than he is getting. He has done nothing in his whole life but what he thought was right."

Encouraged by her feeling rejoinder, Arthur walked with her across the deserted Square. "Oh, Anne"—he seemed to reflect on what he was saying, for his words crept slowly from his pallid lips—"it is not alone because he has suffered and is suffering that I am concerned, but because I am in a position to know that he is right now in danger—great danger."

"You mean from Buck Walker—that miserable outlaw?" she sneered. "We have heard that he may come this way."

"Yes, it is more than likely, Anne," Preston said. "I don't want to add to your troubles, but I must tell you, for you ought to be prepared. Anne, Buck Walker is a desperate man. He has never forgiven your father for enlisting on the other side in the way he did, and the men who are under him are also resentful. Crippled as your father is, they would not pity him—in fact, the very sight of his condition might infuriate them, for many of them lost friends or kin at Chickamauga where he was wounded."

"And you—*you* are intimate with such men!" Anne threw a cold, fierce stare into his beseeching eyes, "intimate enough at least to know what their movements are, *you*, who call yourself a friend of my father."

"Walker is working for the South in his own way," Preston explained. "My superiors do not rebuke him, and how can I? Anne, this is war, and war knows no pity for an enemy. If you should hear that Walker and his

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men are coming this way you must try to get your father to leave. Oh, my God! Anne, do you know what I am doing at this moment? I am, in a way, acting as a spy. I would be court-martialed, my shoulder-straps would be torn from me, I'd be shot or disgraced forever, for what I am now doing. The law of my army says one thing, the law of my heart dictates another. If I am to defend your father, I should put on his colors, raise his flag. I may leave you in the lurch. I may *have to*. My father died for the South, and I glory in his memory. If your father were to be in absolute peril, I might not be able to raise a finger to save him. I am saying this now because of your sad face, wasted form, and desperate eyes. I'm warning you in advance, Anne; it is all that I can do with honor. Poor little girl! I am asking you, frail as you are, to try to save your father and to expect no help from me."

She was moved, and yet, woman-like, was not able to sympathize with his masculine conclusions. "Please do not come any farther with me," she said, coldly. "Your mother and sister may hear of it. In fact, your being in my company now may reach your 'superiors' and throw doubt upon your military integrity. You shall not risk a thing for me or mine. I don't want you to come near me again. I don't want—want—want you even to warn me if—if Buck Walker is really coming. If it were not that my mother was on your side, and her son had not died in your army, I'd—I'd throw this coffee down and leave it."

"Oh, Anne, Anne!" the little blood which had feebly coursed in his face till now seemed to leave it, "you are harsh, but I don't blame you. Whatever you do is right. Forgive me; I'm doing the best I can."

She was hastening on, and there was nothing left for him now but to fall back, and, bowing and lifting his cap, he did so. The broken windows in the buildings of the dismantled Square, the frothy clouds floating in the clear blue sky, were the only witnesses of the youthful tragedy.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN she arrived home she found her father in the kitchen. He had cut some wood, made a fire in the wide chimney, and was melting tallow and pouring it into tin candle-molds into which cotton wicks were suspended from little sticks resting across the tops. The filled molds were cooling on a window-sill; by their sides lay a little heap of fairly straight candles.

"How is mother?" Anne asked. "I have the coffee."

It was an odd, wavering glance that he shifted from his work to her face, and his momentary silence emphasized it. "I'm glad you got it," he finally said. "Mrs. Dill went over to Mrs. Lowry's to see if she couldn't get a chicken to make some broth for your ma. We heard that Mrs. Lowry's boys had caught some running wild in the swamp below her house. Mrs. Dill will be back soon, I reckon."

"But you didn't tell me how mother is," Anne reminded him.

Again she noted his tardiness of speech. Then, with his eyes averted from her face, he said: "She was asleep when Mrs. Dill went off. Mrs. Dill thought she'd sleep till she got back, but, nevertheless, I thought I'd stay down here in the kitchen where I could hear if she begun to stir about. Mrs. Dill hadn't been gone long when I heard your ma pit-pattin' about in her bare feet. I didn't know what to do, for you know Mrs. Dill advised me 'n' you both to stay away. I hadn't begun my candles then, an' so I sat an' listened. The longer I listened the more bothered I was."

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"Bothered? Why?" Anne asked. "If she was out of bed and on her feet it looks like she is getting stronger."

"I'm ashamed to tell you just what I *was* afeard of." He took one of the filled molds and held it before the fire to loosen the candles so that they might be drawn out. "Anne, I was afeard she was desperate enough in all her trouble to lay hands on herself, and might do it while Mrs. Dill was off."

"Oh, oh!" Anne cried.

"At any rate, I wasn't willin' to risk it," Merlin went on, gravely, "and so I went up to her."

"You went up," Anne echoed; "and how was she—what was she doing?"

Merlin took the mold to the window, knocked it against the sill, and began to draw out the six candles, carefully, that the wicks might not slip out of them. "I found her sittin' on the floor—flat on the planks. Her hair was all down her back like a girl. She had Bobby's little trunk before her, and had taken out some of his school-books, old compositions, and some o' his play-things—a pair o' his shoes that he had outgrown, some neckties, and, I think, if I mistake not, a baby jacket. She was talkin' to 'em, like you've seen little girls play with dolls. She must 'a' thought I was Mrs. Dill comin' back, for I had slipped up without much clatter. At any rate, she didn't look up at first, but when she did—when she did—" Andrew went no further, for his utterance was clogged. He picked up the pillow-slip Anne had brought, and took out the brown-paper parcel. "Put the pan on the fire," he said; "let's parch an' grind some right off, and have the coffee ready for Mrs. Dill to take up when she comes."

Anne took down a frying-pan, wiped it with a dishcloth and put into it some of the coffee-beans. "You started to tell me what mother said when she saw you," she said, tentatively.

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"It wasn't so much what she said as the way she looked an' acted." Merlin to some extent had overcome the frailty of his voice. "Anne, she actually spread her poor, thin arms out over the things like she thought I'd come to rob her of 'em, an' begged me not to take 'em—so pitiful, oh, so pitiful! That was what she done *at first*, then she seemed to sorter come to, for she deliberately p'inted to the door, she did, an' said she wanted me to go away. She wasn't as mad as she was that last day in the parlor, but it was every bit as hard for me to stand, if not harder. Lord! Lord! child, you can't imagine how she's changed! She is so frail it looked like a little gust o' wind 'u'd blow her away—an' 'er eyes—Lord! Lord! *her eyes!* I wanted to try to say something in my own behalf, but I was afeard I'd excite 'er, an' so I come right down. I listened at the foot o' the stairs, an' heard her drag the trunk to one side o' the room, an' then I think she went back to 'er bed."

"I wonder if I'd better go up to her?" Anne ventured.

"I don't think I would," Merlin answered. "Parch the coffee, an' I'll grind it. Mrs. Dill will be back soon."

Anne was stirring the coffee-beans, enveloped in the aromatic smoke which all but filled the room, her father seated near-by, when Mrs. Dill returned with something wrapped in a towel under her shawl.

"I didn't git no chicken," she said, "but one o' the Lowry boys give me this here rabbit. It is fat and juicy an' will make good broth. It was Jake, the oldest one. He's just fifteen. He's itchin' to go to war, an' kept askin' questions about Bob. He said he liked Bob, and wished he could—but that was silly, of course—he wished he could die the same way. He was anxious for Ruth to have the rabbit. He said he was hopin' to git some 'possums soon, an' if he did he'd fetch one to her. Folks round about have changed toward us since the report come about Bob."

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"Yes," Merlin seemed determined to pay tribute where it was deserved, "they speak to me now an' then—some of 'em—a *few* at least, especially them that's lost sons the same way. It's strange, ain't it, Mandy, that my boy is *now* doin' me a favor—a great big favor like that, when I used to be afeard he never would amount to anything?"

"I see you got some coffee, an' I'm powerful glad," Mandy Dill said to Anne, after staring into Merlin's eyes for a moment. "Your ma craves it above all else."

One night, two days later, when Anne and her father were about to go to bed, they heard a sound of wheels close to the front door, and a voice calling out, "Whoa!" to a pair of horses.

They went to the door and looked out into the darkness. A man was alighting from the seat in the front. "Hold 'em," he said to a negro beside him. "I think they are still up."

It was old Jimmy Webb, looking like some nondescript animal in his great shawl, coonskin cap, and heavy top-boots.

"Hello, Jimmy!" Merlin exclaimed. "Why, how are you? Come in. I've just banked the fire, but I can dig out the coals and start it up in a minute."

"I'm cold enough, but I can't stop," Webb said, curtly. "I've come on business an' I hain't no time to lose. Me 'n' my wife are goin' to refugee South. Sam's had a split-up with Buck Walker an' gone into the regular ranks. We want to get nigher to whar he's at."

"I see, I see. Well, I don't blame you, Jimmy."

"I don't know what you'll think about it," Webb's cracking voice continued; "you kin do as you like, 'Drew Merlin. It ain't a favor I'm after. I've come to give you a chance to make a little money."

"Confed., or gold?" Merlin smiled broadly. "It makes

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a sight of difference these times, Jimmy. You know you always believed Confederate bills was as good as any, and I never did. I could 'a' had enough to stuff a bed-tick by this time, but I don't handle much of it."

"Don't begin that," Webb snarled. "This ain't no time for a row. I've got to git away. My wife is waitin' for me now over at Dugans'—they are goin', too. My wagon out thar is loaded with stuff t' eat that I had hid away in a safe place, an' can't take with me. Thar's four hundred pounds o' smoked bacon, sides, shoulders, an' hams in the wagon. Thar's two hundredweight o' flour, six bushels o' potatoes—Irish and sweet—six buckets o' lard, and four boxes o' plug-tobacco. At present prices, the load, as it stands, would fetch three thousand dollars, and I've got to git shet of it. I can't take it through the lines by hook or crook. Your armed, blue-coated thugs would nab it before I'd got ten miles."

"I see," Merlin said, thoughtfully, "an' you want to sell it to me. Well, Jimmy, you are barkin' up the wrong tree, I reckon. The God's truth is that I hain't no money for a deal as big as that."

"I don't want ready money," Webb said, his eyes avoiding those of his friend. "I want to leave this stuff with you to use if you like, or sell it. All I ask is for you to pay me what you can when the war is over. If the stuff is took from you, all well an' good, you needn't pay a cent. Thar is nothin' else to do. You needn't give me even your note."

"You are puttin' a big responsibility on me, Jimmy," Merlin answered, seriously; "an' I don't know what to say exactly."

Webb's immediate action was his reply. Going to the door, he called out to the negro: "Hop down, Pete, an' unload!" Then to Merlin: "Whar shall he put it? How's your smoke-house?"

"It hain't no floor in it, an' the door-shutter was jerked

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off by the Yankees the same cold night they burnt my fence an' door-steps."

"They ought t' 'a' burnt your damned house down, an'—an'—" The old man suddenly broke off. "Well, if we are goin' to trade to-night, we'll have to leave war out o' our talk."

"I'm doin' my part at it," Andrew smiled suavely. "I wanted to ax you jest now why you didn't donate all that stuff to Buck Walker's gang to send to the soldiers, but I thought better of it. So you are bent on leavin' it with me, are you? Well, the dinin'-room's big aplenty, an' we can watch it better thar than outside, anyway."

Webb held the front door open, and called out: "Tote it all in this way, Pete. We'll show you."

Accordingly, the supplies were piled up in one corner of the dining-room, Anne holding a candle, the flame of which was blown so badly by the cold air from the outside through the open door that the room was in frigid darkness half the time. Presently the wagon was unloaded and old Webb was hurrying away.

"Remember, you don't owe me a cent if you don't profit by the deal," were his parting words. "When the war is over, if we are both alive we kin settle some way. You already owe me a good deal o' money an' I hain't botherin' about it. The only thing I hate about you—the thing that makes me sick at the stomach every time I look at you, is your damned, bull-headed notion that—"

"Heigh, heigh, Jimmy!" Merlin broke in, with a laugh, as he playfully tapped the old man on his shoulder. "Don't say too much. I might take a patriotic notion to hand all this good stuff over to the Yankees with your compliments, and never pay you a cent to boot."

"To hell with you and them!" Webb cried, with a furious snort, as he flounced away.

Anne closed the door after him. She was shivering from the cold, and turned to her father, who stood over

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the hot bed of ashes in the fireplace. Catching her eye in the light of the dripping candle she held, he smiled.

"I like that old skunk," he said. "I'd do anything on earth to accommodate him. He could 'a' made some other use o' that stuff, but he fetched it to me because he knowed we needed it and believed I was honest enough to pay for it some day. Well, well, we won't starve now, I reckon."

They heard a step on the stairway leading down from Mrs. Merlin's room, and the next moment Mrs. Dill, wrapped in a shawl, appeared.

"I heard you-all," she said, "an' would 'a' come down, but the noise kept Ruth awake an' I had to stay to pacify her."

Anne explained the situation.

"'When it rains it pours, an' blessin's never come singly.' " Mrs. Dill actually laughed. "We certainly need that stuff, but that ain't nothin' to the gift the Lord has sent Mandy Dill to-day. I was in too big a hurry to wait on Ruth to stop an' tell you, besides, I wanted to nuss it to myse'f awhile. I can't sleep, I'm so happy. Folks, on my way home this evenin' I met a Yankee soldier on a furlough. He was tryin' to find me, he said. He was sick an' on his way home over the mountains to git well. He fetched me the news that Mart was alive an' healthier than he ever was in all his life. Lord! Lord! I cried so much with joy that I couldn't talk half decent to the feller. He even told me jokes and pranks o' Mart's that Mart got up to cheer 'em all with. The soldier said they all liked him—that no long march or privation fazed 'im. He said he was brave, too, an' laughed an' joked even while the Minié-balls was a-plinkin' like hail around 'em. The chap said that Mart 'u'd bresh his ear when one 'u'd whiz by, an' say that mosquitoes was powerful plenty this time o' year. Mart sent word that he wanted to see me mighty bad, an'—an', but I won't tell you any more.

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If you hear me walkin' about to-night you'll understand that I'm jest too happy to lie still. I believe, in my bones, that Mart's comin' through this safe an' sound, an' I can hardly wait for the day. Well, I'll go back to Ruth. The coffee done her a sight o' good, but she won't eat. She wouldn't even take the soup."

CHAPTER IX

RUTH MERLIN failed to improve. One day Mrs. Dill came down the stairs and approached Merlin and Anne as they sat in the small lean-to room at the end of the kitchen. The room contained only a large, clumsy loom for the weaving of rag carpets, jeans, and other coarse cloths. Anne had learned to use it, and now sat on the bench in front of it, her deft fingers busy with the troublesome threads that were constantly becoming tangled.

"I don't want to scare you two," Mrs. Dill began, "but I've got to tell you the truth. Ruth Merlin's in a bad fix. I'm doin' all that I kin, but I'm afraid she is sinkin'. 'Drew, we've got to git a doctor, if one can be had, an' that right off."

Anne and her father exchanged grave glances. "Thar hain't but one anywhar nigh," Merlin said. "That's Doctor Wellhouse, an' he's five miles off. He is too old to do regular practice, but they say he is doin' all he can."

"Well, we must git 'im," Mrs. Dill declared. "Anne, if I could leave you in my place with your ma I'd put the side-saddle on the hoss an' go, but I can't do that. It is pitiful how she leans on me, an' the truth is she don't want to see either of you yit. If anything, she's worse in that way. I'm sorry to say it, but I reckon I have to."

"Oh, I can go." Anne put down the shuttle which she had been casting to and fro between the black warp-threads, slid off the bench, and stood up, drawing her shawl about her neck.

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"Yes, you'll have to, I reckon," her father consented, slowly. "I hate for you to do it, sech times as these, for bushwhackers are rovin' all about. Most of 'em hate me, an' some of 'em are drunk half the time."

He went to the barn-yard, got out the horse, took down the side-saddle, and put it and its blanket on the sharp-edged back of the underfed animal. The work was hard for him, for his sharp-pointed peg-leg often sank so deeply into the loam of the uncleanly lot that he had difficulty in extracting it. Passing through the lot gate, he led the horse up to the front door-step where Anne, now wearing an old coat of Robert's to keep her warm, stood with Mrs. Dill.

"I've just thought o' something," Andrew said, as he threw the bridle over the horse's head and put himself into a position to help his daughter mount from his hand. "I wonder if Wellhouse will refuse to come. His son was killed t'other day, you know, an' he thought a sight of 'im. The widow an' two children are with 'im. He may actually refuse—I don't know—he may, an' he may not."

"He is powerful bitter," Mrs. Dill said. "Well, all you kin do is to try, Anne. If I went, though, I'd shame 'im into it. I'd make 'im feel like he wasn't half a man if he refused to wait on a sick woman, war or no war."

Thereupon Merlin made a humiliating discovery; he found that he could not, hampered as he was with his new leg, help a lady on a horse, a thing he had formerly done so easily. He smiled, in a sickly way, as he gave it up. "You'll have to mount yourself," he said, leading the horse to the edge of the veranda.

The horse was old. He subsisted mainly on hay and stubble which Andrew managed to gather from the meadows and corn-fields in the vicinity, and so his young rider found that it was only by constant urging, prodding, and switching that he was made to go faster than a plodding walk. At times, when her switch was briskly used, he

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would break into a reluctant trot, which covered the ground faster, but was so rough in its perpendicular pounding that she could scarcely sit on the saddle. Once or twice she succeeded in forcing him into a labored gallop, but from his hoarse panting and stiff action she decided that that gait was also out of the question. So she finally gave up all attempts at speed and allowed the horse to plod along as he liked.

As she passed the Preston gate her pride had kept her gaze fixed steadily ahead of her, and so she failed to see Arthur, in his own stable-yard, about to mount the only horse the family now owned. He was watching her in no little interest and surprise, and when he left his own premises he followed in her wake. For more than a mile he kept some distance behind her, and might never have approached nearer had not an accident happened to her—the rotten saddle-girth broke; the saddle began to slide backward, and she found, too, that her foot had become fastened in the rusty iron stirrup. She tried to extricate it, but the effort to do so only rendered her peril the greater, so, halting the willing horse, she was wondering how she could descend safely, when, seeing her predicament, Preston galloped up and sprang down. His arm was still in a sling, but hidden by the great, cape-like army overcoat he wore.

"Sit still, don't jump!" he cried, and then he gave her his hand. It felt strong and firm for that of a man who was pale from illness, and it all but lifted her down.

Face to face they stood. "Thank you, thank you," she said. "It was silly of me not to have tested that girth before leaving home."

He drew the saddle down and examined the broken strap of leather. "It is strong enough in the main," he said. "It broke at one of the worn buckle-holes. I can soon mend it."

Having only one hand, she had to hold the strap while

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he worked with his pocket-knife and a piece of rawhide string which he cut from his own saddle.

"Where are you going, Anne?" he asked, as he threw the saddle back on her horse and buckled the repaired girth.

"For Doctor Wellhouse," she answered.

"Then your mother is—no better?" he said, sympathetically.

"I'm afraid she is dangerously low," Anne returned, simply. "I'll have to be going."

"But Doctor Wellhouse lives fully four miles from here," Preston protested, uneasily. "I know, for I've been to him with my arm several times of late."

"I know where he lives," Anne said.

There was a stump of a tree near-by, and she started to lead the horse to it to aid her in mounting, but he stopped her, placing himself in the proper position at the side of the horse. "Put your foot in my hand, as you used to do," he said, a reminiscent, half-smiling look in his shadowed eyes.

"No; you are not strong enough," she objected.

He insisted that he was, but she firmly refused, and led the horse up to the stump, from which she managed to reach the saddle quite gracefully. He placed her foot into the stirrup, and adjusted her skirt over it. She was about to start when he suddenly caught the bridle-rein and held it.

"Anne," he said, "I want you to do something for me. I want you to go back home and let me go for the doctor."

"No, no, I must do it." She seemed to sit more erectly. In her brother's coat, her cheeks colored by the crisp air, she had a piquant, boyish look that was most attractive.

Then he did something, or continued doing something, that slightly offended her. He still held her bridle-rein as a man in authority might have done. "Anne, listen," he said, quite as he might have commanded his sister to

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do what he thought was right and wise. "You must turn around and go back. I'll get the doctor. My horse is faster than yours. I have serious reasons for this, and you must not be foolhardy."

"Foolhardy?" she tossed her head proudly. "That is a nice word to use to a girl who hasn't asked for your assistance or advice."

He seemed to be too deeply concerned over his demand to comment on her sarcastic retort. "I may as well tell you the truth," he went on. "Some of Buck Walker's band have come on in advance of him. They are hiding all about in the mountains. You may meet them, Anne. Some of them are young daredevils, drunk half the time, and reckless. They would know you by sight. They might not do you actual bodily injury, but they might detain you to worry your father. Anne, they might insult you, and—and I couldn't bear that. You are too young and pretty to take such risks. I saw you leave home and followed you on purpose. I admit it. Be angry if you wish, but I must protect you."

"But you *sha'n't!*" she threw back, indignantly. "I shall never go to you or any of your army for help. You say you are following me—well, don't do it—don't come another step! I mean it; don't!"

He made no further protest, and, whipping her horse, she started away without a backward glance at him as he stood cap in hand in the road.

CHAPTER X

ALMOST an hour was consumed in passing over the four remaining miles of her journey. The doctor's residence was a one-story frame building, square in shape, with a porch in front and faded green shutters to the windows. Through an ungated wagon entrance Anne rode straight to the porch. She was about to dismount on the steps when a young woman in a dingy black cotton dress opened the door and looked out with a wistful look of inquiry in her eyes.

"Is Doctor Wellhouse at home?" Anne asked.

"Yes, he has just come," was the answer. "He is out at the barn. Won't you get down and come in?"

"No, I'll ride around there, thank you," Anne returned. "I'm in a hurry. My mother is sick and needs him. I am Anne Merlin."

"Oh, then you are Colonel Merlin's daughter," the woman said, with sad eagerness. "Your father was very kind to my poor husband when he was shot. He wrote me several times and tried to cheer me up before Ernest died, and afterward. He was very kind. Your father is a good man, Miss Merlin, and a brave, noble one."

"Colonel Merlin is not my father; he is my uncle," Anne explained.

"What, you don't mean that you are—are a daughter of the *other one*—the one that—"

"The one that fought with the Union? Yes," Anne said. "And it is his wife that is sick."

"Oh!" the woman in black exclaimed, in a tone that

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sank into sheer bewilderment. "Oh!" she repeated, as she continued to stare. "Yes, my father-in-law is at the barn. His hands are full. He has all he can do in this neighborhood. Miss Merlin, I don't know you, and you don't know me, but an awful sorrow sometimes crushes out all resentment even against enemies, and I hope you won't go away hurt if—if my father-in-law is rough. Ernest's death is killing him. He is too old to stand under it and do the night-and-day work that is on him. Trouble sometimes softens people. I think it has *me*, but it has hardened him. His nerves are all unstrung and he is irritable. Don't blame him for anything he may say. When you have seen him, come in and let me fix you something hot to drink. You look cold and tired. I am making sassafras-root tea and we find it rather good as a substitute for coffee."

"I sha'n't have time, thank you," Anne said, turning her horse toward the barn.

Coming from the lot gate she saw a tall, gray-haired, gray-bearded gentleman, a pair of saddle-bags in one hand. He wore the conventional heavy shawl, ~~woolen~~ gloves, gray jeans trousers, frock-coat, and broad-brimmed felt hat. He recognized Anne at a glance, and slowly, almost reluctantly, raised his hat. She made her wishes known, saw him avert his eyes, and noticed the stiffening lines in his fine face.

"I can't go!" he blurted out. "It is too far. I am needed close about here more than there."

"I'm afraid she is dying, Doctor," Anne said. "I wouldn't beg you, but there is no one else to be got."

He now swept his slow gaze to her face. Its frail beauty may have added to his bitterness. "I shall not go. Let that end it," he declared. "If I were in regular practice I'd feel compelled, honor bound to go, but I'm not. I'm only doing what I can for my particular friends. I have more calls to make than I can manage at my time of life."

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She started to plead again, but, raising his hat with a hand that was quivering with rage rendered childish by his advanced years, he bowed stiffly and turned away.

She accepted his verdict and rode slowly homeward. She felt very bitter against him, and her face was hot with the resentment of thwarted youth.

She had gone only a short distance when Arthur Preston rode out of the woods bordering the road ahead of her, and reined his horse in at her side.

"Pardon me, Anne, but I had to wait for you," he said, almost timidly. "I could not let you ride back alone."

She said nothing. His persistence was a compliment to her, and yet it hurt her pride.

"You must tell me one thing, Anne," he urged. "Is the doctor coming?"

"No, he's like you all, full of venom against even a poor dying woman!"

"I see," Arthur sighed. "I was afraid of that very thing. He is almost out of his senses with grief and despair. I must see him."

"*You?* Why must *you* see him?"

His glance wavered away from her steadily burning eyes. "Why, I want to show him my arm, for one thing. It will save me a ride back to-morrow, you see. I think I may overtake you on your way home."

She read his full intentions, and yet there was no opening for a protest without the admission that she had seen through his subterfuge, and so, with a dogged toss of the head, she rode onward.

He urged his horse into a brisk canter and was soon at the doctor's door. The widow met him and invited him into the sitting-room where the doctor sat at a table mixing some powders and wrapping them in square bits of paper torn from the leaves of an old almanac.

"Oh!" he cried out, cordially, as he looked up and sadly

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smiled. "So the arm needs attention, eh? Well, I am not surprised. A wound like that ought to be looked at often."

"No, the arm is doing finely," Arthur smiled. "I'll see you again to-morrow or next day. I'm in a hurry now. Doctor, I've come to get you for another case. It is a poor, sick woman who is about to die."

"Well, my hands are pretty full, my boy, but I'll do my best. Who is she?"

"The wife of 'Drew Merlin, Doctor. His daughter has just left you."

"You don't mean that you have come to ask *me* to—to go to the house of that damnable traitor?" Wellhouse cried, his eyes flashing, his voice rising and cracking. "Why, I couldn't meet him without taking him by the throat—and—"

"He shall keep out of your way, Doctor, I'll see to that; but you must come at once."

"Humph! You don't know me, my boy!" the old man growled. "I'm only an average human being. If that man had acted right he would have friends aplenty to help him in time of need. Why are *you* coming to me, I'd like to know."

Arthur was silent, so silent that the old man fixed him with a steady gaze of inquiry. Then a light seemed to break on him.

"Can it be that you are interested in that girl?" he asked, impatiently. "You with your family connections, and she—"

"Stop, Doctor!" Arthur said, firmly. "You are an old man, and I am young and full of respect for you, but there are things that even *you* shall not say, especially about a helpless, undefended young lady who—"

"Oh, well, well, let it go!" Wellhouse shrugged his shoulders and forced a smile. "I'll not be challenged by a wounded Confederate officer, a friend of my dead son. No, sir, keep your faith and admiration for the girl."

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She's nothing to me, one way or another. She is said to side with her nigger-loving daddy, though, and this is no time for overlooking that sort of thing, here at home, with our ruins around us. Damn 'em all, I say! I've had enough, boy—*enough*, I tell you!"

"You must come, Doctor," Preston persisted, now smiling affectionately. "You said once that you'd do anything I asked. I am asking this now. It is the biggest favor I could ask. It is everything to me."

"I see what you mean, Arthur," was the slow answer. "Well, I have to ride over to Jim Fordham's sick child right away, and I'll come on from there. But see to it that I do not meet 'Drew Merlin. I couldn't attend to his wife if I did. All hell is burning in me. I want to fight. I don't want to be doing professional favors for damned Yankees, North, South, East, or West."

"I'll see that you don't meet him," Arthur promised, and he smiled gratefully as he shook hands and left.

By fast riding he overtook Anne within a mile of the village. Her horse had cast a worn shoe and was now limping and moving more slowly than ever. She glanced backward as he cantered up behind her, but made no response to his bow as he reined in alongside of her.

"He has agreed to come," Preston announced. "He will be there in an hour or so."

"Agreed to come?" she repeated, incredulously.

"Yes, he is all right now, Anne. He was a little upset when you saw him. He had had time to reflect, and I'm sure he is sorry that he refused in the first place."

As Anne looked at him, a sweet helplessness, almost that of complete resignation, captured the lines and curves of her wistful face.

"What did you do—what did you say to him?" she asked, her pretty, wind-reddened lips twitching.

"Oh, nothing much, Anne." He was plainly flushing as he avoided her direct stare. "My coming, when I did,

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only gave him a chance to act on second thought, that's all. He knows he has no right to show favoritism at a time like this. There is only one little thing which I hope you will try to manage for me—for *him*, I mean."

"What is that?" she asked.

"I think, perhaps, that it may be best for him not to meet your father."

At this Arthur saw her eyelids contract as she steadily stared over the bobbing ears of her horse. "I understand," she muttered, resentfully. "It is always—always some insult, veiled or otherwise, to my father. Even the doctor who comes to see his dying wife must throw mud in his face as a part of his fee. Old as this doctor is, he has not lived long enough to understand such a man as my father. He is not fine enough—not noble enough. Yes, I'll have my father avoid him—I'll do that."

"Oh, Anne," Arthur gently protested, "I wish you, too, could understand the other side. Through my—my deep friendship for you, I think I see both points of view. You feel as you do because of your love for your father. The doctor feels as he does because of his dead son. You have your father still, but the doctor's son is gone forever. Surely you—"

"Oh yes, that's true," she interrupted, with a lingering sigh, "but I sometimes think that death would be kinder to my father than life is. Death may mean eternal unconsciousness; my father's life is mental agony, and I can see no end to it as long as he lives. That's the terror of it—no end to it."

"And you are true to him, Anne, as true as steel," Arthur said, his admiring voice tending downward in his throat. "I have my own prejudices, but your fidelity to your father is to me the sweetest, noblest thing in the world."

Little more was said between them on the ride homeward. Fully aware of her objection to his attentions at

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any time, he reined his horse in as they reached the brow of the hill overlooking the village. "I won't go any farther," he said. "You see, I know how you feel, Anne. I wish it could be otherwise, but I suppose it can't be helped."

His remark was more than half a question, but she made no response to it. There was a pause. Her horse had stopped with his. She was about to start on when he suddenly said: "I'm going away to-morrow, Anne. Will you shake hands and tell me good-by?"

"Where are you going?" she asked, without looking at him.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "I hope it won't mortally offend you, Anne," he said, "but I am going back to my regiment near Atlanta. I see a way to get through the Federal lines. I may fail, but it is worth trying."

"In your condition?" she sneered. "Don't you think that is silly? Of what use would you be, wounded as you are?"

"There are certain things I can do to help the others," he answered. "I am active here, why should I not be there where help is so much needed? You may not care even to say good-by, Anne, but I want to do it. You know, after all, I may not get back."

She said nothing, but he saw her lip tighten under indecision, and then, seeing his hand extended, she reached over and took it. "Good-by," she said. "If you do get back, I hope you will see some things differently from what you now do."

A retort rose to his tongue, but it was plain to her that he checked it. "Good-by, Anne. I shall think of you often, and I hope your troubles will end. Troubles ought to be for men, not for delicate girls."

She rode on alone down the little-used road, which was rain-washed and out of repair. She was strangely dis-

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turbed. His return to the army seemed a senseless thing when viewed from any point. Her heart felt heavy, and that angered her.

"He is stupid, stupid. They are all fools," she muttered, her face hot from the contending fires within her. Whipping her horse, she forced him into a brisker gait.

CHAPTER XI

SHE found her father on the walk in front of the house, waiting for her. He said nothing as he gave her his hand to assist her in dismounting.

"How is mother?" she asked, lightly springing down beside him.

"Mrs. Dill says she don't see any change," he answered. "She is still worried. Is the doctor coming?"

"Yes, in an hour or so." Here she adroitly suggested that it might not be best for him to meet the doctor. "You know," she added, "people say he is nearly crazy about his son, and perhaps, since we want his best advice, we'd better not excite him."

"I understand, oh, I understand!" Merlin answered, resignedly. "I understand, an' I pity 'im, too. I'll bet I'd be exactly like 'im, if I was in his place. Yes, I'll keep out o' sight. If he's good enough to serve me I'll pander to his whims."

An hour later Anne met the doctor at the door. He was frigidly formal. She offered to take his hat, but he retained it. "Where is your mother?" he asked, bluntly.

"This way, Doctor." It was Mrs. Dill at the top of the stairs. "Come right up, please."

The doctor evidently knew her, for Anne heard him sniff angrily as he started up the stairs, his saddle-bags in one hand, his hat in the other. Outside the door of the patient's room Mrs. Dill stood waiting for him. She bowed and smiled, but he only stared at her fixedly.

"She's dying of a broken heart, Doctor," she said. "It is

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the mind more than the body in this case. Ever since her poor boy went off and—”

“I know all about that!” Wellhouse broke in, angrily. “Everybody knows that his rascally daddy sent him off to the Yankees for safety, if not to fight against his home and kindred.”

“But, Doctor, you don’t know what you are a-talkin’ about. Bob enlisted—”

“Don’t argue with me, woman!” the doctor thundered. “Another word from you and I’ll go away. Where is the patient I am to see?”

“Oh, Mrs. Dill, please! please!” It was Anne’s urgent voice from below; and, understanding, Mrs. Dill refrained from giving the explanation she felt was demanded by the facts.

“All right, Anne,” she called back. “He is going in now. I didn’t mean no harm.”

“Your sort *never* means harm,” Wellhouse fumed as he followed her into the darkened room. It was his genial custom to shake hands with patients, white or black, but he did not do so now. “Let in some more light, please, madam,” he said to Mrs. Dill, “and then be so good as to leave us alone for a few minutes. I’m worn out by loss of sleep and hard riding, and—and—well, I can put up with just so much and no more.”

Wisely silent now, Mrs. Dill parted the window-curtains. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun fell into the room and crept toward the sick woman’s bed. Mrs. Dill left the room, softly closing the door.

The doctor bent over Mrs. Merlin. She gave him a wan smile of greeting. “How are you?” She asked the question he might have put to her had his mood been different.

He said nothing, taking her thin wrist and testing her pulse.

“Don’t tell me I’m going to live, Doctor,” she said,

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softly, her sunken cheeks moving like thick, yellow cloth. "I don't want to—oh, I don't want to stay another day! I want to go to Bob."

"Well, that is out of the question," he said, perfunctorily. "A woman in your condition can't be moved anywhere. You ought to have gone when he did, if you can't stay away from him."

"I wanted to go"—she had not seen the doctor's drift—"but he was in too great a hurry. Oh, if I had—if I had, if I had, I might have seen him before he was killed."

"Killed?" the doctor repeated. "When did you hear that?"

"Oh, some time ago," she groaned. "It seems a year. I'm glad you came, Doctor. I heard that your son was killed, too, and I know how you feel. Oh, I pity you—I pity you! I know how you hate the Yankees, for I do with every nerve and vein in my body. I can't bear the sight of 'Drew Merlin! I haven't seen him but once since the news came. He has robbed me of my parents and my son. He sha'n't come near me again. It was to do his father's duty that Bob went away and died. The poor boy thought that 'Drew ought to have sided with the South, and when 'Drew came back Bob borrowed the uniform of a dead Confederate boy from a broken-hearted mother and went away in it. He didn't wear it a week before he was struck down. They say he died with his musket in his hand, cursing the devils in blue. That's a little mite of comfort, ain't it, Doctor—ain't it?"

"You mean to tell me that your son died in the Confederate service?" Wellhouse seated himself on the edge of the bed. His fingers gently slid down the frail wrist to the bony hand. His voice had sunk to a gulping whisper.

"Didn't you know that? I thought everybody knew it."

"The people have been misinformed," Wellhouse ex-

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plained, leaning nearer, his eyes on the beamless orbs in their dark sockets, "but they shall be told the truth, now. I'll make it my special duty, Ruth. Wherever I go I'll tell them how he died. And to think that I hesitated to come to you! God forgive me, child. I'll come every day, every day, from now on if it is possible."

At the foot of the stairs, as he went out, the doctor met Anne waiting for him. She was surprised at the change that had come over him, for he took her hand, and, as he spoke, he held it gently, even caressingly.

"I am afraid I acted in an ungentlemanly way out at home," he said. "I hope you will pardon it. I'm over-worked and am old and weak. I hardly knew what I was saying."

"Oh, Doctor, don't!" Anne said, deeply touched. "It was more than good of you to come when all is considered. How is she—how is my mother?"

He added another hand to the one that held hers, and as he held it he stroked it gently. "I'm sorry, my child, that I can't give you any hope at all. I don't see how she can live long, now. Her whole being is crushed and the vitality has gone out of it. I'm sorry to have to say, too, that it would not be wise just now for you or your father to go near her, unless she requests it. You see, my child, it is best not to excite or antagonize her. She is very frail and nervous."

"I understand," Anne faltered, her eyes filling. "And so you think she never can get well—*never?*"

"It is only a question of a short time," he gave out, after a sympathetic pause. "She is only a frail, human straw in the grasp of this great tornado of misfortune. She has been swept out of reach of all aid. Death will be a blessing to her. Child, I know whereof I speak. I was cowardly and irritable under my own burden till I saw your mother up there, and now I'm ashamed of my weak-

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ness. What a poor, stricken woman can bear I can bear and *will* bear. Good-by."

When he had gone Anne turned into the parlor and sat down amid the gathering shadows which crept into the bleak house from the desolate spaces without. The new realization of the loss of her mother was tightening its hold upon her. How strange it seemed! now that the fires of resentment had cooled and the memories of her childhood drifted upon her like the blown leaves of flowers. Robert, jolly, prank-loving Robert, was dead; her mother was dying, and nothing would be left her. Nothing—nothing, and yet—yes, there was something, after all. It was the dull thumping of a wooden leg on the floor of the hall. Her father was coming, and she rose, wiped her eyes, and stood ready to meet him.

CHAPTER XII

ONE afternoon, a week later, Doctor Wellhouse came down from the patient's chamber, meeting Mrs. Dill at the front door. "No better," he said, shaking his head. "I'm doing no good, and it is a waste of time for me to come again. I am badly needed in an opposite direction. Captain Preston was a patient of mine here, but he has gone back to war. I must leave Mrs. Merlin in your care."

"I understand, Doctor," Mrs. Dill said. "I'll do the best I can."

He had crossed the outer threshold and stood hesitatingly on the edge of the veranda. Suddenly he turned back and faced her. "There is another matter," he said, his glance having a tendency to shift from her observant eyes. "I am in a position to know things that you would not be apt to know, here in this house, anyway. Sick people, dying people talk freely before me of their private affairs. I am called to the bedsides of bushwhackers and outlaws. My fidelity to the South, as I see it, however, does not bind me in honor, professional or otherwise, to approve of irregular methods of warfare, and I'm going to tell you something which you ought to know. A small, but rough branch of Buck Walker's band is headed this way. They claim to be foraging for the Confederate forces. I have my doubts that any provender they capture ever crosses the Union lines. If I was sure that it did I'd have to act differently, but I am not sure, and so I feel obliged to warn you of something. It has been

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reported that a considerable supply of provisions were left here by old Jimmy Webb, and the bushwhackers are coming this way to-night. They intend to search the house. They may be rough, for they do not believe that Robert joined the Confederate Army or that his mother is in sympathy with the South. I tried to convince some of them, but failed. They think it is one of 'Drew Merlin's tricks, and they want to get even."

"I see—I understand," Mrs. Dill said, gravely. "I heard they were prowlin' about in the mountains. What do you think 'Drew had better do?"

"I don't care what he does—his fate doesn't concern me in the slightest," Wellhouse snapped, a dark look sweeping over his face. "I am not mentioning this on *his* account. But the food belongs in part at least to the dying mother of a Southern soldier. If you can hide it all or even some of it I'd advise you to do it. As for 'Drew Merlin, if he has the sense of a gnat he will not be seen. They would tear him limb from limb if they got hold of him. He has plenty of time to get away, lame as he is. Yes, you may warn him if you wish. Our leaders in war are merciful to the wounded enemy, and I'll have to be to him, whether I want to or not. Yes, tell him—tell him. If he was captured here the excitement of the row might kill his wife, and she is truer to our cause to-day than any woman I've met. God bless her, I say! God bless her!"

When the doctor had gone Mrs. Dill turned into the sitting-room. No one was there. She went on to the kitchen. A sound in the little weaving-room adjoining led her thither. There she found both Anne and her father. He was trying, with a hammer and nails, to mend a broken beam of the crude loom. She did not delay her information. Her hearers listened gravely.

"You must go, father," Anne said, quickly. "You must go to the woods. It wouldn't be for long. If you

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resisted them—and you would do it—the excitement might actually kill mother.”

Andrew nodded his head slowly. “Yes,” he admitted, “I’d better go. I know the woods well enough to get out of the reach of these fellows. But what about the supplies? They belong, by rights, to Jimmy as much as to me.”

“The supplies will have to go, I reckon,” was Mrs. Dill’s opinion. “We can’t hide ’em. We haven’t got time enough. If we made any sort of a move from the house with them, the Preston slaves would see it and report it.”

“Yes, we can’t save the stuff,” Andrew agreed. “It is getting dark, and thar is no telling when the gang will come.”

Mrs. Dill suddenly left them. Through the open door, they saw her standing in the middle of the kitchen, her brows drawn together in thought. Suddenly she began to smile. They saw her clapping her hands. They heard her chuckling.

“Folks, listen to me—*do* listen!” she said, now laughing aloud. “I’ve got a scheme, and I’ll be hanged if I don’t think it will work as slick as goose-grease.”

“Scheme for what?” Merlin asked, as he and Anne joined her.

“To save old Jimmy’s supplies,” she returned, still smiling. “Now, look. What if I was to tell you that we must move all of the stuff, heavy as it is, into that weavin’-room thar?”

“And what good would that do?” Andrew asked, wearily. “Do you think they wouldn’t search thar?”

“No, they wouldn’t,” Mrs. Dill said. “I’ll fix it so that they won’t know thar *is* a weavin’-room, or ever *was* one. Do you see how tall and wide that cupboard is? Well, after the stuff is moved into the weavin’-room I’d close the door and shove the cupboard smack-dab against

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it. It would cover the opening, frame and all, completely. You see, the gang would think the cupboard was at the end o' the house, and never think o' pullin' it aside to look behind it. They would have to measure the length of the house both on the outside and on the inside to detect the trick, and they won't do that to-night."

"Splendid, splendid!" Merlin laughed. And they set to work moving the supplies. By the time it was done it had grown quite dark, and the door was closed and the cupboard moved into place. It was found that the deception was perfect. They lighted candles and looked at it from every point of view.

"It will fool 'em, I do believe," Andrew declared. "You've got a long head on you, Mandy."

"Father, you must hurry," Anne warned him, and she got out his overcoat, and rolled up some blankets for him to take. "You'll be cold to-night," she said.

"Oh, I'll be all right," he returned, lightly. "I'm used to roughing it. I hate to be driv' from my home this way, but on your ma's account I must submit." At the rear door he kissed Anne and shook hands with Mrs. Dill. "When they come," he said to the latter, "try to keep 'em from bothering Ruth." There was a note of something like despondency in his unsteady voice. "Tell 'em how sick an' low she is. Tell 'em that—that Bob fought for their side, an' fell while at it. Tell 'em anything to keep 'em from botherin' her. Tell 'em that—that me 'n' Ruth's about parted on account o' my conduct. Tell 'em that her ma an' pa an' all her kin is for the Confederacy, too. You know if they rushed up thar with all their racket it might hurry on the end. An' she don't deserve to die, Mandy Dill. She's never harmed the hair of anybody's head, white or black."

He broke away suddenly. Anne followed him a little way into the falling darkness, and returned crying profusely.

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"Don't give way!" Mrs. Dill put a comforting, motherly arm about the girl, and wiped her wet eyes with her apron. "You'll need all the strength you got to meet them scamps an' throw 'em off the track. I'm goin' up to see how your ma is, an' I'll be back soon."

She came down in a few minutes. "She is asleep. The poor thing is almost too weak to keep her eyes open. Let's make a good fire in the sittin'-room, an' act like nothin' uncommon is goin' on. Leave the curtains up so they kin see in, an' let's be readin' or sewin' when they come."

Anne was drawn into her cheerful mood. She sat in the candle-light with her knitting, and Mrs. Dill held a newspaper and kept up her fusillade of light talk. The far-off barking of a dog at the foot of the mountain road was their first intimation of the approach of the expected band, and it was not long before they heard the rumble of horses' hoofs on the stony ground. The sound grew more distinct till the house was quite surrounded by horsemen, who had not spoken a word, and who were evidently trying to move silently. Anne continued to sew, Mrs. Dill to read. She put down the paper when some one crossed the veranda and rapped on the door.

"Stay here," she whispered to Anne, and, lighting another candle, she went to the door and opened it. A tall, booted and spurred young mountaineer wearing home-made trousers of jeans, a Confederate coat and cap, a sword in a brass scabbard, and a belt full of pistols, stood before her.

"Howdy do, sir? Won't you come in?" she asked, shielding the candle from the outside breeze.

"Oh yes, we'll come in," he laughed. "In fact, that's what we are here for."

"Well, make as little noise as you can, please, sir," she said. "Mrs. Merlin is up-stairs at the point of death."

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"Is that so? Well, that's bad." Again he laughed. "The old trick! Starvation, eh? No food in sight. That's the tale on all sides, Mrs. Dill. Nobody has had anything for a year in this neighborhood but old Jimmy Webb."

"You are right thar, young man," she replied, promptly, "and he is the stingiest old he-devil that ever used his feet to walk. I wouldn't go to him for help if I was dyin' for a morsel to eat."

"No use wastin' time," the officer said. "We are going to search this place, Mrs. Dill." He stepped to the edge of the veranda and called out, "Six of you fellows come here; let the rest circle the house and stable!"

The ordered men, all as young as their leader, dismounted and came into the candle-light, their spurs and sabers rattling and clanking as they tramped up the steps.

"Listen to me, young man." Mrs. Dill held her flickering candle into the leader's face. "You are makin' entirely too much racket. We don't care how much you search this house, for you won't git nothin' worth your while; but I don't want you to bother that poor dyin' woman up-stairs. I'm goin' to make you a fair offer, young man, an' if you are the gentleman you look to be you'll accept it. If you will walk up the stairs with me I'll show you a woman as nigh dead as any you ever laid eyes on."

"All right," the leader said, smiling. "Wait here, boys. You know I took a course in medicine. Nobody can fool me by shammin' sickness."

"Be careful, Cap," one of the men cautioned. "Old 'Peg-leg' may be lyin' in wait for you up there."

"Not with you fellers out here to burn the roof over his head," the captain answered. "He is not as big a fool as that. Lead on, madam; I'll follow you."

With her candle in her hand, Mrs. Dill tiptoed ahead

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of him up the stairs. "Put your hand on that sword," she said, frowning on him. "You sound like ten mules crossin' a barn floor with trace-chains on 'em."

Half mystified, he obeyed. When they reached the door of the sick-room Mrs. Dill gently opened it and led him to the bed in the corner. She held the candle high. "I'm glad you've studied medicine," she said. "Do you see any hope for this poor creature?"

A bare look at the dying woman, who seemed to be in a coma too deep to be roused, satisfied the outlaw. With a sheepish look he removed his cap. His features softened as if washed to tenderness by sheer pity.

"Let's go down," he said, retreating toward the door. "Excuse me for doubting your word, madam. We are ordered to do this work, and have to do it."

Holding the candle over her head, she followed him from the room and into the one opposite, which he searched thoroughly. Then she led him down the stairs, at the foot of which he met some of his fellows.

"Don't go up there," he commanded, "but search the rest of the house as quietly as you can. Let the boys outside attend to the barn."

"What are you chaps lookin' for, if thar is no harm in askin'?" Amanda inquired, in the plausible tone of mere feminine curiosity.

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "We are after the big load of provisions that old Jimmy Webb left here a short time ago," was the direct answer. "Old Jimmy has pretended to be with us all along; but we happen to know that he is a business partner of 'Drew Merlin's. He knows he'll never get his money out of that marble investment unless he keeps Merlin alive, and we got it straight that he left the provisions here before he went south."

"Oh, I remember now"—Mrs. Dill actually wiped her smiling lips with her tallow-coated fingers—"old Jimmy

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did stop here one night with a two-hoss load o' stuff. He offered to sell us a side o' meat an' a sack o' flour if we'd pay 'im gold for it. *Gold*, mind you! He wouldn't look at a roll o' Confed. money as big as my arm that 'Drew showed 'im. Oh yes, he's a Reb, but one that looks out for number one. I wish I knowed whar he *did* dump that stuff. If you find anything more under this roof than a sifter full o' corn-meal an' a few cat-licked bacon-rinds, you'll beat me, for I'm a good looker an' smeller, too, where grub is concerned these days."

With a bewildered, thwarted expression the officer stared at her for a moment. Then lifting his brows doggedly he said: "Boys, search this floor thoroughly. We may be on a wrong scent. If you run across 'Drew Merlin, keep your temper and fetch 'im to me. His wife is dying up-stairs, and we don't want to make much racket."

Quietly the men entered the room Anne was in. At the sight of her, and as a tribute to her youth and beauty, they hastily doffed their caps. She was standing in front of the fire.

"Won't you come and warm yourselves?" she asked, stepping aside. "It must be cold riding to-night."

Sheepishly, and with the innate politeness of their class, they declined the invitation. Their leader, by the aid of Amanda's candle, which he had borrowed, had surveyed the carpetless floor, and now motioned his followers toward the dining-room and kitchen. Mrs. Dill sat down and drew Anne to a chair beside her, holding her cold fingers to the flames in the soot-lined fireplace. When the men were out of the room she bent down and pressed her tattered skirt against her ankles to keep it from scorching.

"So far, so good," she said, in a grim whisper and with a slow, half-amused wink. "If they discover the door we hid, they will do it by dragging that heavy cupboard out, and men movin' as soft as them are now hain't apt

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to do it. They've just got one candle, too, and that is in our favor. Lord! Lord! I'd love to put that trick over on 'em, for one thing, because it was my own idea. Men think they are so sharp, an' that us women don't count in any deal."

The creaking rear stairs showed that the bushwhackers were ascending to the bedrooms in that part of the house, and Mrs. Dill chuckled anew. Their grinding tread on the floor above indicated that the search was being furthered there. Presently they came down and filed through the sitting-room.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you," the leader said to Anne, in a respectful tone. "We have our orders and must obey them."

"That's all right, young man," Mrs. Dill said. "Your apology is accepted. You might do us a good turn, though, if you *do* run across that load o' stuff in your rounds. We'd consider it a great favor if you'd let us have a little bite of it."

Intuitively he seemed to grasp the teasing quality in her mood, and with a cold smile he ignored it. "I'm glad we did not run across your father," he went on, addressing Anne by preference. "I have a fair control over these men, but the sight of a Yankee soldier drives them crazy. I reckon your father has been warned of our coming. There must be more spies around here than we thought."

"Warned nothin'!" Mrs. Dill's forethought produced. "He went to try to get a doctor to come see his wife. Sharp as you fellers are, you don't seem to be able to put two and two together."

"We need you, madam," the captain said, now smiling freely.

"I'm paid better by t'other side," she jested. "Good night. The front door is wide open, an' the cold air is goin' up-stairs on that poor sick woman."

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There was truth in her remark, and with a bow he withdrew. Side by side the two women sat. They heard the front door being softly closed, and the rattling of stirrups, the creaking of leather, as the marauders mounted their horses and rode away.

CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning, after satisfying herself that the bushwhackers had left the vicinity, Anne set out to find her father and inform him that the way was clear for his return. Before leaving she asked Mrs. Dill how her mother was.

"No change that I kin see at all," was the gentle answer. "She just sleeps, an' looks, from her peaceful face, like she's dreamin' o' some'n' pleasant-like."

Unobserved even by any of the Preston household, Anne made her way through the stable-yard, over the rail fence, and into the thicket which was the fringe of the denser wood beyond. In parting with her the night before, her father had said that his hiding-place would be at the foot, on the northern side, of the mountain peak called "Finger Rock," and she now saw it draped in sun-lit clouds against the blue sky two miles away. She elected to go straight through the woods, rough as the way was, rather than incur the risk on any road or path of meeting some unfriendly person who might draw troublesome deductions from her actions.

The way was rough. She had to cross time-cut gulches in the virgin stone, clamber through the mazes of briers, wild vines, thorn-bushes, and at times creep under the low-hanging boughs of cedar and beech trees. The soles of her shoes were worn thin, for leather was too scarce to supply even her father's apt hands with the material for their repairing, and the sharp stones cut into the tender flesh of her feet, but she didn't care for the pain, so deeply

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engrossed was she with the thought of reaching her father. What had he not suffered through the night? she kept asking herself, for the weather had been colder than usual, and she doubted the wisdom of his having a fire, the light of which might have betrayed his position. Finally she reached the neighborhood of the spot toward which she had directed her steps. It was a gloomy, sunless place. Tall, gray cliffs shot upward like mighty spears of stone, jagged and sharp at their sky-piercing apexes. She wondered if he, hearing her step, might not be too wary, thinking that she might belong to the body of his pursuers, to approach her. She at first thought of calling out his name, but decided not to risk that, fearing that her voice might reach other ears than his. As she advanced deeper into the veritable jungle—soggy, fern-filled, and dank as the vales above which the Ark rested, and was said to be the abode of bears and other wild animals, she suddenly bethought herself of making her presence known by singing as if to herself. Her sweet, courageous voice rose on the frail wings of an old hymn, fluttered helplessly, and fell. She found that she could not sing. She had not sung since the war broke out and killed the impulse of joy which had once been its fountain-head. But short-lived as it was and faint, the effort served its purpose, for she heard her father's call from the swampy spot on her left. She advanced in the direction from which the sound came, and as she moved she heard the dry twigs and stems of leaves breaking under his uneven tread, and the suction of his peg-leg as he drew it from its holes in the mire. Presently she saw him and her heart sank at the sight of his haggard face and disheveled hair. Cockleburs, bits of leaves, and pine needles clung to his wrinkled clothes, and his one shoe was covered with mud so thickly that even the strings were hidden from view.

He smiled at the sight of her, and limped forward,

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striving to find spots solid enough in the marshy ground to resist the narrow point of his wooden leg. She bounded toward him, and passionately embraced him, for her relief at finding him safe was very great.

"Well, well," he chuckled, "you come quicker than I expected. You see, I didn't know but what they might hang around Delbridge for several days. I've been scared about you, too, baby. I hope they didn't say nothin' out o' the way to you. Them gangs are rough sometimes."

She was carrying a little poke containing some bread and fried bacon, and, leading him to the trunk of a fallen tree, she made him sit down while she got out the food and gave it to him. He ate it eagerly, for he had not eaten since the day before. "My, my! ain't this good?" he cried. "Now tell me everything—but first—first tell me about your ma. How was she when you left?"

"About the same," Anne answered. She had never told him how seriously ill the doctor had said her mother was, and she now tried to avoid it by at once recounting the happenings of the preceding night.

He laughed out impulsively when she went somewhat into detail over Mrs. Dill's audacious method of dealing with the men. "That woman's a whole team!" he declared. "She is as funny as a circus clown. Who else 'u'd ever 'a' thought o' that trick? If I'd 'a' hid thar I'd 'a' been as safe as I was out here with the owls."

"How did you pass the night?" she inquired. "Where were you?"

"Don't ask me, child. Lord! I don't want to think of it! My bed was over thar behind them rocks. I toted up a lot o' leaves, but most of 'em are damp this time o' the year, an' I found I couldn't lie on 'em without feelin' the chill o' the earth through 'em, so I set up most o' the night. Toward mornin' it got so nippin' cold that I stood up an' swung my arms an' stamped my foot to keep my

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blood goin'. My matches got wet when I was lyin' down or I'd 'a' had a fire, light or no light. Now"—he had finished eating and was rising—"let's go home. The walk won't hurt me. In fact, it will do me good. I am as stiff as a bone."

Their progress, now over the best roads and paths, was slow, and it was about two o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the rear fence of his house.

"To make sure," he suggested, "maybe you'd better leave me here in the thicket while you run in an' see if nobody is about, then come let me know."

She saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and climbed over the fence alone. She was half-way between the stable and the house when she saw Mrs. Dill leaving the kitchen door and coming toward her.

"Oh, Heavens! didn't you find 'im?" Amanda cried, in dismay.

Anne smiled and nodded toward the thicket. "He's there. May he come on in?"

"Yes, thank the Lord! A man ought to be about the house now. Wait!" as Anne was turning back. "I'll go with you. He can't climb the fence by hisse'f. We'll have to let down the rails."

But Andrew had seen them and was already at the fence. Taking hold of the highest rail, he drew himself up, swung his peg-leg over, and managed to get down inside the lot. He saw from their faces that he might safely do so, and, smiling good-naturedly, he trudged toward them.

"He is almost totally exhausted," Anne said, in an undertone to Amanda. "He didn't get a bit of sleep last night. We must give him a warm supper and put him to bed."

Mrs. Dill gave her an odd look, started to say something, but checked herself suddenly, for Merlin was close to them, smiling a bland greeting to her.

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"I've heard all about your prank, Mandy," he said. "Of all the funny things that happened to me an' Mart in the ranks an' out, yours caps the stack."

Anne thought it queer that Mrs. Dill failed to meet his jovial mood, that she was even silent at such a moment. "How is my mother?" she suddenly asked Mrs. Dill, as she caught her arm and held it with unconscious insistence.

"You must 'a' been powerful cold last night," Mrs. Dill remarked to Merlin. "With all the windows and doors closed, and with plenty o' quilts over me, I felt it along toward mornin'."

He laughed freely. It seemed that the mere sight of his home had cheered him by contrast with what he had passed through. "Well," he chuckled, "I'll tell you what I want as bad as anything I ever wanted in my life, and that is a good, wide bed to stretch out on. I feel like I could sleep a solid week."

"How is my mother?" Anne repeated, staring straight into Mrs. Dill's face.

Again Amanda addressed Merlin. "You are cold, I'll bet. We've got good fires in the kitchen an' settin'-room both. Cato come over from Mrs. Preston's an' chopped up some wood for me."

"Cato? How did that happen?" Merlin wanted to know, in surprise. "Why, I thought them niggers was all too stuck-up to—"

"Mrs. Preston come over, too." Amanda seemed to be deliberating over what she was saying in a most unaccountable way. "The truth is, 'Drew, I went over myself an' spoke to 'er. She ain't so black as she's painted. At heart she's really a good woman. Mary would 'a' come, too, but I told her—I told her that there wasn't anything a right *young* woman could do, an'—an'—"

"What are you talking about, Mandy Dill?" Merlin's great mouth was contracting at the corners, the stare from his pinched eyelids was strained.

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"I don't know how to do it, 'Drew," Amanda gulped, "but I'm tryin' to let you both down as easy as I can, for I'm so sorry for you I don't know what to do. You've got to bear what everybody else is bearing these days, in one way or another, in this God-forsaken land."

He understood. Anne understood. The girl put her arms around her father. His shoulders bent in the effort he made to lift his wooden leg.

"Father," Anne faltered, "don't forget that I am left to you, and that I shall remain with you, heart, soul, and body, as long as I live."

"Can it be true? Can it really be a fact?" she heard him muttering to himself as he sagged along at her side. "And not one last forgiving word to me!"

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE long struggle drew to an end. The courageous South was beaten and starved into a state of utter helplessness. One cloudy morning in early spring Merlin limped up from the deserted Square and met Anne and Mrs. Dill in the front yard, the fence and gate of which he had restored at odd times to keep his mind and body busy.

"Lee has surrendered!" he cried, waving his old hat. "It was longer comin' than I thought at the start, but it's here at last!"

Anne entered but slightly into his enthusiasm. It was true that war between the armed forces was about to end, but war against her and hers by the enemy closer at home showed no prospect of ceasing. Indeed, she told herself that the return of the fugitive inhabitants to their ruined homes meant only fresh insults to her and her father.

Shortly after that the local activity set in. Houses were opened, families came back. The straggling soldiers returned by train, in wagons, on horseback, and afoot. All day long they passed the door on the way to their various homes. Now and then a small group went by with a furled flag in its midst. Now and then a weather-beaten drum rattled, a battered bugle was blown, a fife shrilled, or the words of "Dixie" were sung defiantly and yet as sweetly as a lullaby to a dying child.

One day the isolated trio saw an ex-slave driving past on the front seat of Thomas Merlin's carriage, which,

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somehow, had escaped destruction or capture at the hands of the enemy. They knew, from report, that Thomas and his wife were expected home, and correctly surmised that the carriage was being sent to the station to meet them. In the last six months of the war Thomas had been promoted to the rank of brigadier-general, and now no man in the State stood higher in the estimation of the people he had so valiantly served.

Mrs. Dill stood at a window of the sitting-room, waiting for the return of the vehicle. Anne and her father sat behind her, strangely silent.

"I see 'em!" Mrs. Dill suddenly cried out, and Anne rose and went to her side, followed by her father, who, with his weight on his natural leg, stood somewhat behind them.

"I'd go out and shake hands with Tom if I knew how he felt," he said, in a low, dubious tone. "He might be friendly, and then ag'in he might not. Folks say he hain't so bitter as some o' the most rabid, but I don't know."

General Merlin sat on the rear seat of the carriage, his wife by his side. He wore his uniform, and a great scar across his right cheek marked the thrust of a saber. He was very erect, very imposing, and his brother thought there was something about his bearing that was very genuine and, after all, very admirable.

"They all looked over this way," Amanda observed, in a comforting tone. "Somehow, 'Drew, I don't believe you'll find 'em exactly unforgivin'."

"I don't know," Merlin answered, thoughtfully. "I seed him look at the house, but maybe he done it to show indifference. He's apt to feel hard for a good many reasons. He is now in a position to git any office in the gift o' the people, an' I'll be a constant eyesore to 'im in my fix. Well, I won't bother him, if he won't me."

The carriage was now opposite the Preston gate, and to the surprise of the hidden observers it stopped. A

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young officer in a faded uniform was coming from the house saluting in due military form. It was Arthur Preston, whom they had not seen till now, and he was accompanied by his mother and sister. The attitude of the group at the carriage was that of reverence and even adulation. The general had gallantly bared his broad brow, and bent forward with all the grace of his youth and added dignity of age and high rank. Presently the carriage passed on. The observers left the window. Anne found herself full of a restless resentment she could hardly have defined. Part of it was against the entire group at the carriage, but most of it somehow centered on Arthur Preston. Perhaps he was pitying her and her father for being ignored by their distinguished kinsman. Well, she could pity Arthur and his family, too. After all, they had lost what they were fighting for, and her father's side had won, as he and she had long ago predicted.

A little later that day Arthur Preston called and sent word to Anne by Mrs. Dill that he wanted to see her. Anne flushed warmly when the message was delivered to her.

"You'll have to go in," Mrs. Dill said, with a pleased, half-probing smile. "If you begin actin' offish it will keep up, an' you must remember that you got to live alongside o' these folks in the future an' must make the best of it."

Anne declined Mrs. Dill's further advice to run up to her room and change her dress, but went into the parlor just as she was. That she was looking well, however, Mrs. Dill assured her. "Your face is flushed, sorter, like you was mad, an' yet not that exactly, either. Your eyes are a-sparklin' an' your hair has the fluffy look above the eyes an' round the neck that I like to see. Yes, go on. I reckon you'll do very well."

Arthur, who sat at an open window, dressed in an old suit of clothes which he had left at home when he went

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away, bounded up as she entered the room, and came forward, smiling cordially.

"How's our little Yankee?" he jested. "My, my, you have changed, Anne! but it is for the better."

"I didn't know that you were back till a short time ago," she said. She did not ask him to resume his seat, but as she herself sat down, he did likewise, and edged his chair toward her.

"I came last night," he explained. "It seemed odd, getting home in the dark. I went out in the yard and looked over this way, but saw no lights. I suppose you all still go to bed early."

"When your bushwhackers are not after us," she said, coldly.

"My bushwhackers, Anne?" he protested, mildly. "Don't put it that way."

She shrugged her graceful shoulders, but made no retraction when she went on: "I doubt if they will stop their depredations now that the war is over. They are highway robbers, any way you put it."

"Not always, Anne," he argued, gently. "We benefited often by the supplies they got through to us."

"You benefited, while women and children who were true to the Union went without food. That's gallantry for you!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "We are beginning our old fight over again, already." He smiled reproachfully, his fine eyes beaming forth a meaning that could never be put in words. "Anne, I was shocked terribly when I heard of your mother's death. My mother wrote me of it. If she hadn't come over when she did I should have thought less of her than I now do."

"She never approached us afterward," Anne answered, tartly. "She never glances even at the house as she passes. As for her coming over when she did, she went shortly afterward to the death-bed of an old negro woman,

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and by her manner your mother is giving us to understand that when she came here that day she was doing the same sort of condescending duty."

"Oh, Anne, Anne!" he exclaimed, his willing smile dying out of his tense face, leaving it full of patient, far-reaching regret, "are we always to be like this? I want to let bygones be bygones, and surely you ought to meet me half-way. The war is over; enough ill-feeling existed; let's wipe it all out and begin over again. I am not responsible for the way my mother and sister act. They are bitter, but they can't help it. My father's death is their chief sorrow, but there are other things to bear. Many of our negroes will leave us, now that they are free. We are land-poor, with big debts of honor to pay. I have made up my mind to work in the field and earn my bread by the sweat of my brow. I must wipe out some obligations my father left unsettled. Somehow, I am cheerful under it all. The struggle has been so long and horrible that I feel a sort of joy in being here at home to breathe air not laden with the stench of burning powder. Night after night I've lain awake in my tent, or out in the open, thinking of the home I used to love so passionately, and always—through it all I thought—thought— But I won't mention that now. I don't want to anger you. I—I don't want to—to—but you will know some day. It is you that is bitter now, and in a way you have a right to be. God knows you'll have much to bear. The pity of it is that the ending of the war has not ended your turmoil. I want to help you through it. You have never given me the right to presume to offer aid, but nevertheless I shall do all I can."

"I thank you, but I don't need help at all," she said, more softly. "I don't feel that I owe even explanation to any one. However, the day may come when you and all the rest will understand the nobility of my father. As long as he suffers at the hands of these people I shall

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resent their treatment. You no doubt saw his own brother drive past us to-day. He stopped at *your* house, but not at *ours*. Do you know that was the first shot that was fired in our new war?"

The young captain's glance became fixed on the floor, a flush struggled into his cheeks. "I was afraid you would notice that," he said, slowly, awkwardly. "If General Merlin had not been my superior officer—if I had not revered him as one of our great leaders—I would have endeavored to remind him of his duty—but how can I really call it a duty? Men of his age and your father's must settle their disputes between themselves. It will eventually come out right. Anne, in your bitterness you may not realize it, but your uncle is a great and noble man. Some have thought that he used to be autocratic, proud, and over-ambitious, but if he ever was, the part he has played in the war has taken it out of him. His men from the lowest to the highest fairly worship him. I happen to know that he tried to give a fellow-officer the rank that was bestowed on him, but the honor was conferred in spite of him. Don't blame him for what he did to-day, Anne. Remember that, after all, your father is on the winning side. All that General Merlin was ready to die to gain has gone over to your father's cause. If either of the two men should step first across the line of pride, the winner should be the one. Grant's example as he returned Lee's sword to him should be the example of the living North to the dying South."

Anne was silent for a moment. "General Lee," she said, presently, "is not like these narrow, resentful people. He would forgive my father for doing his duty as he saw it, and me for standing by him. Even father's crippled condition will be like the hated flag shaken in the faces of his neighbors."

"Not if his brother does his full duty," Arthur said. "If the general forgives, they will also. Believe me, when

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he and your father meet and shake hands the whole thing will be forgotten."

"You may know *men*, but you don't know *women*," Anne retorted, with a dubious smile. "If ten thousand generals of the Confederacy forgave my father their wives and daughters never would."

"We shall see; we shall see," Arthur laughed. "Is your father at home?"

"Yes; he goes nowhere at all, now," Anne replied.

"I wonder if he would see me?" Arthur asked. "I want to shake hands with him and beg a favor of him. They tell me he has some seed corn to spare, and I must have some. We are going to start planting to-morrow, Cato and I. We have only one horse left, but there are plenty of rusty hoes and plows."

"I'll send him in," Anne said. "He will be glad to see you."

"Don't go yet," Arthur pleaded, gravely, as she was rising. "I can see your father at any time."

"I must go, if you will excuse me." Anne was now standing erectly before him. "There is a lot to do, and Mrs. Dill cannot attend to it all."

When she had found her father in the garden at the back of the house, and sent him in to the visitor, she went into the kitchen and found Mrs. Dill shedding tears of joy as she sat cleaning the tall earthenware churn and its wooden dasher.

"Mart is comin'!" she sobbed. "He will be here to-morrow or next day. He is in Augusta headed this way. Oh, Anne, child! it seems to me that I'd go through ten times as much trouble as I have been through for this great blessin'."

Anne bent and kissed her. "I'm glad for your sake," she said, allowing her warm cheek to rest against the woman's wrinkled one for a moment.

Mrs. Dill dried her eyes on her apron, her thoughts

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taking a sudden turn. "Why did you come out o' the parlor an' leave Arthur Preston thar?" she asked.

"He wanted to see father," Anne answered.

"I don't believe a word of it." Mrs. Dill thrust the handle of the dasher through the hole in the churn's lid, and rolled the churn to one side. "Now listen to me, Anne. You've got to be sensible. Go right back into that parlor an' entertain your company."

"Do you really think that I—that I am actually in love with Arthur Preston?" she flashed forth, tossing her head and standing more erectly.

"Well, I don't know," Mrs. Dill smiled. "You are a puzzle to me, but if you ain't in love, thar is somethin' wrong in your make-up, that's all I got to say."

"Well, I happen not to be," Anne declared, and she turned away to do some work about the kitchen.

"Pshaw! we'll see!" the older woman said. "Shucks! I say; well, we'll see—we'll see!"

CHAPTER II

AS the weeks passed local affairs began, after a fashion, to adjust themselves to the new routine. Martin Dill, gaunt and weather-beaten, with no other clothing than his blue uniform, had come. Merlin had insisted that he and his wife make his home their own. "I don't see how we could git along without Mandy," Merlin said. "She's been all in all to us, an' me an' Anne would be powerful lonely here in this big house by ourselves. An' as for you, Mart, you are the first friend I've seen for many a long day."

"It will suit me powerful well," Dill replied. "It seems to me that it will take us six months to git through talkin' about what we've done since we parted. I confess I want to be with somebody of my own kind. They say Buck Walker's bushwhackers hain't never disbanded, an' I reckon he will have it in for me 'n' you both, fer givin' him the slip like we did."

"Yes, he's active still," Merlin answered. "He's got a taste o' outlaw life, an' he wants to keep it up. He claims that he is keepin' the unruly niggers in order."

A few of the stores in the Square opened. Goods and food of the plainest sort were offered for sale. The two churches, the Methodist and the Baptist, held occasional meetings, when some superannuated minister or ex-Confederate chaplain proffered his services. Since his last disagreeable experience at his own church Merlin had not been inside the building. And one Sunday when Dill proposed to go Merlin smiled and shook his head.

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"What? go thar in that bunch?" he cried. "*You*, with that indigo suit on, an' *me* with this game leg? Why, they would rise from their knees an' mob us, an' drap down ag'in an' thank the Lord for fetchin' us to their 'burnin'-bush.' "

One of the crudest returns to custom was the opening of a private school by Major Wilton, a one-armed Confederate officer, who had been a planter before the war, and now was incapacitated for manual labor. On all sides the enterprise was encouraged. Young men who had served in the army, and young ladies who had for years been deprived of educational opportunities, as well as young children, flocked to the court-house, the entire upper floor of which was converted into hastily improvised class-rooms.

"You mustn't fall behind the rest, you simply mustn't," Andrew said to his daughter when he read the printed circular which was handed in at the door. "You may not want to go, but you'll have to. Major Wilton is a perfect gentleman an' he holds no grudge ag'in' me."

Anne decided to go, and she got together the few school-books in her possession, and attended the first day. She had foreseen a chilling reception at the hands of the other pupils, but in her troubled fancy she had not painted it so darkly as it really turned out to be. Major Wilton was kindness itself. Her beauty and refinement appealed to him as well as her isolated helplessness. As he took her books and looked over them she saw that he was on the verge of some allusion to the obvious Coventry in which she was placed, but seemed unable to do so in words which would not add to her embarrassment. As it was, when the brass bell on his table was rung for the opening, she found herself alone on a long bench, while all the other girls were nestled together in friendly pairs or groups. When recess was announced, at ten o'clock, all the others rushed out to the playground, leaving her alone

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in the school-room. Major Wilton came to her sympathetically. It was as if he wanted to help her bear her ostracism, and yet was unable to do so.

"These are harsh times, my dear," he said, as he stood holding some exercise-books under his stub of an arm, "and all any of us can do is to make the best of them."

She nodded. She was on the point of crying, and yet determined that she would not do so. At noon she went home, taking with her her books and the little bottle containing the pokeberry-juice which served as ink.

Andrew saw her come in, and read her face as she tossed her books on the table in the sitting-room. "Well, I see you don't take to it overmuch," he sighed. "I was afraid it would be that way."

"I am not going back," she answered. "I can study at home, and I will."

As it concerned her welfare, it pained the great-hearted man inexpressibly. For days he talked of it privately to Dill and his wife. In fact, his mind seemed to rest on it almost to the exclusion of any other topic. One morning, without speaking of his intentions to Anne, who he knew would oppose him in it, he went to the court-house just as the school was opening. Laboriously he climbed the stairs to the main room where all the scholars sat awaiting the opening prayer by the principal. Major Wilton, a small Bible in his hand, was about to rise when Merlin entered the door and thumped up the middle aisle to the platform. At the sight of him a titter rose and spread into a laugh that passed through the whole room. Andrew glared about, his face red, the hand holding his old hat quivering. Rising quickly, Major Wilton, with a stern wave of his hand, rebuked the room and offered Merlin a chair beside him.

"I'm glad you came, Mr. Merlin," he began. "I was thinking of calling on you as soon as I found time. I

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missed your daughter, and imagine that I know why she did not come back."

"It seems that she couldn't stand it," Andrew blurted out, running his fingers through his hair, and bending closer that his voice might not be heard by any of the grinning spectators, who were staring at him above their books and slates. "I thought I'd come and see if anything can be done. I reckon my money is as good as anybody's, Major, and I don't want my girl to fall behind the balance."

"I wanted her to stay, for she has a bright mind, Mr. Merlin, and her face and manner show that she has a fine character. But I confess that the situation was harder for her than I thought it would be. After I found she was not back the next morning, I talked to the whole school. I tried to make them see their duty and behave accordingly. I even spoke of your son's services to—"

"Yes, I know," Merlin said, with a sigh. "At any rate, *he* was on their side."

"It has been reported that your wife, too—"

"Yes, yes, she turned ag'in' me, too; but Anne stuck. I reckon they know that, don't they? An' that's whar the shoe pinches."

"Yes, that seems to be the general impression," Major Wilton answered, reluctantly. "They are all very sore, Mr. Merlin. Most of them have lost relatives, negroes, or property, and can't get used to it. I think I see your point of view, but these young people can't. You see, they are to *their* parents what your daughter is to *you*."

Groans, grunts, and derisive catcalls rose and filled the room. A farmer's son started out singing "John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave" in a loud voice. Major Wilton sprang up, grasped a switch from his table, and shook it in their faces. The noise subsided. Merlin started out. Hisses, muttered threats, and yells filled the room. The floor had not been well swept, and

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a thick cloud of dust rose, for the pupils were stamping their feet and rapping on the benches with their books and slates. In his excitement, as he limped down the stairs, Andrew failed to place the tip of his wooden leg properly on a step, and he fell against the wall and narrowly escaped plunging headlong to the bottom. As he passed out of the building into the now busy Square he avoided meeting the merchants at the farmers' wagons in front of the stores, and went directly home.

"Anne mustn't know this," he said to himself, dejectedly. "She'd hate it awful. I had no business tryin' to fix it up, nohow."

Reaching home and not seeing Anne, he inquired after her of Mrs. Dill.

"She's up-stairs in her room, studyin', or tryin' to study," was the information given him. "But she ain't makin' no headway, 'Drew. I kin see that from the worried look on her face."

"No, she can't git along that way," Merlin agreed. "Mandy, I'd send 'er off to a good school if I could afford it, but I hain't got the money, an' I'd miss 'er powerful, too. I've stood a lot; but havin' her away now would be the worst yit."

"No, I wouldn't send her off if I was you," Mrs. Dill counseled. "She wouldn't leave you, noway—not that girl! I've seen girls dote on the'r daddies, but that un caps the stack. Her sun rises an' sets in you."

"Do you think that—do you really think that?" he asked, eagerly, the flabby sacs beneath his eyes seeming to fill as he stared, his lips limp, quivering, and wet. "Well, she's got to have her chance, along with the rest in this community."

CHAPTER III

SOMETHING of a diverting nature happened the next day. A young man called to see Andrew. He was from the North, as was shown by his modern dress and pronunciation. He was about thirty years of age, dark, smooth-shaved, rather slender, well-bred, and educated. Anne met him at the door and invited him into the parlor, where he sat waiting for her father.

"Did he say who he was?" Merlin asked Anne, when she had announced the visitor's presence.

"He said his name was Worthington, and wants to see you; that's all he told me."

The visitor rose as Merlin entered the room. "I'm a stranger here, Mr. Merlin," he said, easily, as he shook hands. "I'm from Springfield, Massachusetts. I came South to seek an opening in my profession. I am a lawyer, and have an idea that there will be a chance for me here later, if not at once. I picked out this place because I like its location in the mountains. I love nature, and the scenery here is unsurpassed."

"Maybe you didn't count on the natural prejudice ag'in' you fellers up thar," Andrew ventured to say, as delicately as possible.

"I must admit that I didn't expect to find it quite so strong as it is," Worthington smiled. "And, by the way, that brings up what I've come to see you about. The truth is, Mr. Merlin, that when I went to the little hotel in the Square I was actually refused admission. The proprietor is a hot-headed young mountaineer, and his wife is like him."

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"I know, I know." Merlin drew his brows together. "I could have told you as much. Well, an' so you are high an' dry without a place to eat an' sleep, I reckon?"

"That is it, and as I am expecting some mail to be sent here, I don't want to leave till it arrives. So I came to you for advice, being told that you are a Union man. I thought you might be able to tell me of some boarding-house where I might be able to get a room and meals for a few days till I can decide what to do."

"I know of none," Merlin said, "but I'll do what I can for you myself. We've got a spare room up-stairs, an' you are welcome to it. Food is scarce still, but if you will put up with our plain fare we'll do what we can to make you comfortable."

The stranger seemed greatly relieved and was profuse with his thanks. Mrs. Dill showed him up to his room, and when his trunk arrived from the station it was sent up, and the new-comer rapidly made himself at home. He was most adaptable, being not at all hard to please. He expressed himself as delighted with the novelty of all he saw. He talked well, and entertained them with many personal experiences. The weather being warm, they sat on the veranda after supper every evening. As the days passed, without his receiving the mail he expected, Worthington seemed greatly disturbed. One morning he laughed and said: "You must put me to work, Mr. Merlin. I can't continue to live off of you this way, and until my check comes I am penniless. There must be something wrong with the mails."

"Never you mind about that," Andrew returned, hospitably. "Don't you bother. I've been treated friendly up North, an' I want to do the same to you down here."

One morning Anne and her father were seated on the veranda. Anne was trying to do a difficult sum in arithmetic, but could make no progress with it.

"I wish I could help you, but I can't," her father said.

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"I never had no head for figures. I can multiply whole numbers pretty well, but fractions mix me up."

At this moment Worthington came down the stairs and took the vacant chair beside Anne. She was closing her book when he reached forward and took it and the paper and pencil inside of it.

"Oh," he laughed, "this is like old times to me! I used to teach, you know. I paid my way through college that way."

"What? You used to teach?" Merlin said, eagerly.

"Oh yes," Worthington returned. "I kept it up for a while even after I began to study for the Bar. It was the only way I had of earning a living. I liked it so well that I was tempted to become a teacher permanently."

The next moment he had discovered Anne's error in the example she was trying to work, and pointed it out so that she saw it clearly. He asked her to show him her Latin books, rhetoric, and other studies, and when he had looked them over he put her through a sympathetic and skilful examination.

Andrew told him of what had taken place at the school, and he smiled as if he quite understood the situation.

"You need directive advice," he said to Anne, "but that is about all. If you wish, I will help you with all your studies."

That afternoon Merlin followed him to the shade of a tree in the yard. "I want to be plain with you, Mr. Worthington," he said. "What you done this morning pleased me more than anything that's happened since the surrender. My girl is all I have left, and I want her to get a fair show. While you are here, if you will teach her, I'll give you your board and room, and anything else you ask. If you will do this, you'll be a regular godsend to me."

Worthington could not restrain his delight. "Why, Mr. Merlin, it is nothing but a pleasure, I assure you,"

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he declared. "I see now that it will be several months before I can make any sort of professional start here, and if I can earn my board in the mean time, I would be more than paid."

So it was settled. Andrew limped away, flushed with joyous relief. He joined Dill and his wife at the kitchen door, where they both sat "stringing" beans for dinner. He fairly bubbled over as he told them what had happened.

"By hunkey! my girl hain't at the bottom of the bag after all," he chuckled. "They may hoot an' snarl at 'er, but she is the only one in this town that has a private teacher at home, and he's a good, up-to-date one. I'll bet he could give Major Wilton odds and lay him in the shade."

"Well, that's all right, 'Drew," Amanda Dill remarked in her turn. "It's all right as long as the two of 'em just study the'r books; but young folks like them ain't liable to do that always. He's away down here alone, an' Anne is shut off from other young men. It hain't no business o' mine, but you never laid eyes on 'im before, an' you don't know 'im from a side o' sole leather. I like to listen to 'im myse'f, an' I'm sorter sorry fer 'im, but I believe I'd warn Anne to keep a sharp lookout. I'm a good judge o' folks myse'f, an' generally size 'em up about right; but when one says pahst and lahst at every breath, an' dips his fingers in his drinkin'-glass an' wipes 'em at the end o' every meal, when thar is a wash-pan an' water in his room—well, I just don't know exactly whar to put 'im, that's all."

"You hain't used to Northern ways an' talk," Merlin laughed from the depths of his satisfaction, "an' I am. I tell you he's a good thing, an' happened along just at the right time. An' don't you be afeard o' Anne fallin' in love with the wrong man, neither. She's got a long head on her; an' the feller she approves of will be all right."

Botany was one of Anne's studies, and it was a favorite

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pursuit of Worthington's. Many afternoons were spent by them in rambling over the hills and collecting specimens which he classified, pressed, and filed for future reference. They were in the depths of the nearest hillside wood one afternoon when Arthur Preston came along, a woodsman's ax on his shoulder. He was dressed in the coarse homespun clothing of the poor farmers, and appeared quite different from the last time Anne had seen him. He smiled as he doffed his hat and bowed.

"I'm on your father's land," he said, "but I am only crossing it. I've been at work on our own property over there blazing some trees for the negroes to cut down for fence rails and firewood."

Worthington stood curiously attentive while they chatted for a few minutes. Presently Anne introduced them to each other. The exchange of platitudes between the two men was marked by restraint, and Anne was normal woman enough to observe it. Suddenly Worthington discovered that he had dropped a parcel containing some specimens they had gathered, and went back to look for it.

"He is my teacher," Anne explained. "He is nice. Don't you think so?"

Arthur leaned on his ax and frowned. "I see," he said, evasively. "One of your father's Northern friends, I suppose?"

"Oh no, father had never seen him before he came." Here Anne referred, indignantly, to Worthington's experience at the hotel, and went on: "Of course we gave him shelter. His treatment was an outrage. He is an educated gentleman, and I was ashamed to have him know that this is my home."

Arthur's eyes seemed to burn from a kindling fire which he was trying to suppress. "I have nothing to say against this man personally, Anne," he answered, slowly, "for I don't know him, but surely your father knows that the

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South is being overrun just now with all sorts of irresponsible adventurers from the North."

Anne was angry now. She fairly glared at him. "I know what you mean to insinuate, and it is contemptible!" she cried, crisply, turning to look up the hillside where Worthington could be seen searching among the trees. "Do you think he would say that of you if you happened to be at his home up North?"

"He might not have as good reason," Arthur retorted. "The first duty of a Southern man is to look to the protection of the women he cares for, and—and—well, if I were your father—if you were my sister, Anne, I'd not consent to your making a friend, a daily companion, of a man I knew absolutely nothing about."

"My father is a good judge of character and so am I," Anne threw back, frigidly. "We certainly wouldn't go to any one as narrowly prejudiced as you are for an opinion of any one from the North."

"I see I have offended you, Anne, and I am sorry," Arthur said, gently. "I say I'm sorry, and yet, in one way, I'm not, for I stick to what I said. I want you to be on your guard against this particular stranger, for, to tell you the truth, I don't like his looks."

"You don't like his looks!" Anne sneered, loftily. "How could you like the looks of a Northern man? I tell you that you are prejudiced. I used to think that you were *one* man who could rise above prejudice occasionally, but you are as irrational as any of the rest. I see him coming. Perhaps you'd better not wait. I am sorry I introduced you to such a questionable character. Besides, we have our studies to continue."

"Anne, Anne—" Preston began, helplessly, but seemed unable to think of anything to say, and as Worthington was now hastening toward her, waving the parcel triumphantly, Arthur tipped his hat, shouldered his ax, and walked on.

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As Worthington came up he looked after Arthur with a slow stare of interest. "Did you call him captain?" he inquired. "Is it possible that a fellow like that could have risen to such rank?"

"Yes, he was a captain," Anne returned. "He fought all through the war; he was badly wounded once. Young as he is, he was about to be promoted when the war ended. He did some wonderful and brave things at the front. He is a favorite of my uncle, General Merlin, and has befriended my father several times."

"Queer! queer! I must say!" the Northerner exclaimed, reflectively. "He looks like—like—well, like one of your untamed mountaineers. He doesn't pronounce his final g's, and doesn't sound his r's. He said, 'befo'' and 'goin'.'"

"He belongs to one of the finest old families in the South," Anne said, with acrid precision. "His father was an officer of distinction, who was killed in battle. They owned a lot of slaves."

"Ah, I see—a slaveholder!" Worthington's contempt and satisfaction were evident. "That may account for my impression of him. You see, a human being who could get his moral consent to own, control, and live on the labor of another human being—"

"Let's not discuss it!" Anne was surprised at her own warmth as she broke in. "Southerners, like Captain Preston, may have some faults, but so have you Northerners. *Your* ancestors once burned persons alive. In their dense ignorance, they called the poor things witches."

"I hardly know where to put you, Miss Merlin." Worthington writhed under a look of chagrin, and shrugged his shoulders. "At times you seem to be neither one thing nor another. It really seems to me—"

"Did you recover all the flowers?" Anne coldly interrupted. "There was one violet in particular that I wanted to keep."

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"Yes, I have them all," Worthington returned, non-plussed, as they resumed their walk homeward. "Yes," he began again, after a moment's hesitation, "I hardly know how to take you. You are a mystery, but a delightful—charming one."

She said nothing to this, and he noticed that she quickened her step as she glanced at the sinking sun, the slanting red rays of which shimmered through the trees and fell at their feet.

CHAPTER IV

IT was not long before another Northerner called to see Merlin. Being the only Union man of any prominence at Delbridge, he was the natural target for all such individuals. This visitor, Edward Foster, of Philadelphia, was a man of middle-age, who had long, brown whiskers, keen brown eyes, and a suave business manner, rather than that of the philanthropist he said that he was trying to be.

"It is this poor, downtrodden black race, trying its new wings of freedom, that I want to help before I die," he explained, in words he had evidently used before. "I have a private income, and I feel that I ought to give the remainder of my days to this aim. What better could I do, Mr. Merlin?"

Andrew shrugged his shoulders. "I hardly know how to answer you, Mr. Foster. It is an awful mess down here right now. Up thar at your home I reckon you've read *Tom's Cabin*, some hot abolition articles, an' let your mind an' imagination sort o' run in that groove; but you'd have to actually live here to know the full truth. You will smile, I reckon, if I tell you that I'm every bit as sorry for the Southern whites as I am for the niggers. If you will look about you, you'll see that the niggers are gittin' as much to eat an' wear as they ever did, for the'r old owners are lookin' after 'em the best they can; but it is different with the whites. They are feeling the change—the sudden drop—I tell you. You'd only have to lose all the cash you've got an' most o' your blood kin

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to understand what I mean. I feel like givin' you a piece o' advice without meanin' to meddle in your plans. These folks are on their back, strugglin' to git to their feet ag'in, after losin' all they fought for, an' I'd advise you, with the brogue you got, fine clothes, an' your pockets lined with ready money, to keep quiet. A Yankee feller over the mountains t'other day was give' a free ride on a rail and daubed from head to foot with tar an' feathers."

"Is it as bad as that?" the stranger blandly asked. "I begin to understand something now that was a puzzle. Down at the Square just now I saw a group of negroes, about fifty strong, and I got up on a box and made a speech to them. A few white men came from the stores and looked on for a minute and went away. I thought at the time that they seemed resentful. However, I got the ear of the freedmen. They all listened as if their very souls were taking new root in their poor rag-clothed bodies. It was a pathetic sight—pathetic—pathetic!"

"Well, I'm sorry you did it," Andrew said. "I know you meant well, but you are too fresh on the ground to know the best thing to say or do right now. Thar are yellow half-breeds amongst the niggers that only need such talk as that to make roarin' devils out of 'em. They are the sort that set fire to barns, insult helpless white women, and put Confederate soldiers back on the war-path, while they ought to be let alone to adjust the'r-selves to the new conditions. I kin imagine what you said, an' with all respect to you, I'll bet it was one-sided from beginnin' to end."

"Perhaps, perhaps," the stranger returned. "But, Mr. Merlin, nothing said with true, heartfelt eloquence ever was a compromise. Truth ought to pour from the indignant soul of a speaker like water forced through a nozzle. Give it a good many directions, and it becomes as aimless as a spray or the fall of drizzling rain."

"Long, drizzlin' rain is better for hot, sun-baked

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ground than the hardest, short-lived downpour," Merlin smiled. "The trouble with your knock-down-an'-drag-out method is that thar hain't a bit o' pity or forgiveness for the whipped side in it."

"I'm rather surprised to hear such views from you, sir." Mr. Foster was looking at the crude peg Merlin had thrust out in front of him for the comfort of his strap-bound thigh. "You, who had the courage, as I am told, to fight as you did for exactly what I am contending."

"The fight is over." Andrew half sighed, as from past memories rudely awakened. "Our Saviour said for us to turn the other cheek *before* the battle, an' even in *the heat* of it, but as I didn't have backbone enough to do that, surely I ought to try to do it now that my enemy lies about me, sick with defeat."

"But what's the South doing for the race it has oppressed so long?" demanded the Northerner.

"All it kin," answered Merlin, and the conversation languished.

Presently, when Dill had joined them and been introduced as another Union man, it became plain that Foster could talk as interestedly on other topics. He remarked that he had been interested in the mineral possibilities in that mountainous section, not that he had any idea of ever devoting himself to business again, but he had formerly made money by investments in mineral lands, and had not been able fully to eradicate the interest thus implanted in him. Here he found Merlin on his favorite topic. Andrew spoke quite frankly of his own holdings in undeveloped marble lands, and asked the stranger if he was a judge of "fine stone."

Foster yawned, looked at his watch, and said something about having to catch a train to Atlanta. "Oh yes," he said, "I think I am a fairly good judge of marble. Have you a sample of yours at hand?"

"Yes, if you will wait a minute," Merlin said, eagerly.

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"Mart, you know whar that box o' polished slabs is. You are spryer 'n I am. It's purty heavy, but I reckon you can tote it."

Dill disappeared, and soon returned with a ponderous wooden box and placed it on the floor. The visitor had the air of a man who was too much engrossed in other things to be vitally interested in the mere prospective value of mineral property, for he waited for Merlin to select a sample, dust it with the tail of his linen coat, and bring it to him.

The stranger glanced at the sample carelessly, passed his fingers over the smooth surface, and handed it back. He looked at his watch again, shrugged his shoulders indifferently, and said, "Is that a sample of the *finest* grade you have?"

"Well, yes," Andrew answered, with a show of disappointment. "I had a big piece, a long, slim slab that I kept out in the weather in the backyard to see how it would stand exposure. My wife passed away durin' the war, an' a Yankee soldier happened along who said he was a stone-engraver. He said he used to do such work, and had a few tools with 'im, an' so I got 'im to mark the slab for me. It's in the graveyard on the hill now. If you have time I could take you up thar."

"Oh, this will do," Foster said, languidly. "So you still own this property, do you? Well, I am sorry to dash your hopes, if you have any in regard to the future market on this stone. The truth is—I gather this from old associates in the business, being out of it myself, as I told you—I gather enough to know that the market is quite overstocked. Big quarries are opening in Tennessee and Kentucky, and the samples I happen to have seen are far ahead of yours. The truth is, if I were you I'd put the property to some other use. Surely a considerable body of land like yours could be put to some useful purpose."

At this point of the conversation Dill walked away.

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He joined Anne in the yard at the side of the house. "Your daddy deserves a better deal than he's ever had," he said, sympathetically, after telling the girl what the stranger's opinion was in regard to the marble. "He has been counting on a sale of that property for a long time. While we was off in the war he kept sayin' that some day you and Bob would benefit by it. Only t'other day he told me that he intended it as a nice nest-egg for you. He said that you had stuck to him through thick and thin, an' that he was going to leave you comfortable through this very source. He said as soon as things was more settled he was going back to New York an' work up his old deal with the same fellows he almost closed with. But if the country is flooded with marble, as this man says, and the quality of your pa's stone is off, why, of course, it may fall through."

"How did my father take what the man said?" Anne inquired, anxiously.

"I don't know. I come away," Dill said. "I didn't want to look at 'im, I felt so sorry fer 'im, knowin' how much he had at stake."

They saw the stranger leaving. Andrew had accompanied him as far as the gate, and now turned toward them. He was smiling to himself, and chuckling softly.

"What did you think of 'im, Mart?" Merlin asked, still smiling. "How did he strike you? I'm curious to know."

"I can't say—I hardly know," Dill answered, mystified by his friend's bubbling cheerfulness.

"Well, I hain't had as much pure fun in many a day," Merlin said. "Them Yankee fellers always did amuse me, an' this un is a whole show."

"Well, he didn't tickle you so mighty much when he told you what he did about your marble, did he?"

"That's right whar the fun begun!" Merlin laughed aloud as he put his arm about Anne's waist and drew her

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to him with a sudden rush of tenderness. "I thought I'd bust out laughin' in his face, but I helt in an' begun to play 'im like a trout on a line. Oh, I see, Mart, you didn't catch on!"

"Catch on?" Dill said, gropingly, with a helpless glance at the mystified Anne.

"Well, I couldn't expect you to, not knowing Yankees as I do. I tried to catch your eye to wink at you, but you left. It is funny how them fellers up thar used to always think that because I wore shabby clothes and had my own way of talking that I was weak in the upper story. And now that my clothes are even worse, and my leg off, this un thinks I'm a plumb sucker. The truth is I was watching that chap like a hawk all the time he thought he was throwing me off with his glib negro talk. I reckon he *did* get up in the Square and make that speech, for Northern men have two sides to 'em—one is political and t'other is grasping for money. But, la, me! Didn't you see through him? The offhand way he fetched up the marble question was too plain for any mistake. When he axed me *one single question*, Mart, I was dead on to 'im. He said, 'So you *still* own that property, do you?' He axed that, you see, Mart, when I hadn't said one word about when I bought the land. Then he went on, after he had sniffed at the quality of the stone, and spoke of my considerable body of land, *considerable*, mind you, Mart, when I hadn't said it was one acre or a thousand. Mart, if I had a ten-year-old child that couldn't do better than that in a trade, I'd spank it."

"So you think—you think, 'Drew, that—"

"I'll tell you both what I do think," Merlin broke in. "I think this chap is in with McCormack. Mack is a long sight too slick to uncover his tracks like this Foster did, but I think Mack *did* send 'im down here to nose around an' find out if I still owned the land. You see he is too sly to write direct to me. Mack never worked

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that-a-way, because he don't want me to think he is at all anxious. I'd bet a hoss to a ginger-cake that I'll hear from that old bunch o' mine, an' that before long. Wait an' see if I hain't right."

Leaving Merlin and his daughter, Dill went into the sitting-room, where Worthington sat looking over some of Anne's exercises. In an exuberant mood of intense admiration of his friend, Dill spoke of the stranger's call and his suspected purpose. Worthington raised his brows in surprise, for it was the first hint he had had of Anne's prospective inheritance. He was too shrewd to make detailed inquiries, but from that moment his attentions to the girl were more marked, his efforts to please the entire household more delicately contrived. The next day he told Merlin that he had received the long-expected remittances and wanted to pay him for his board.

"You can't do it, young man"—Andrew patted him familiarly on the shoulder—"that is, not unless you hand me a bigger bill for your teachin' my daughter. She is making wonderful progress under you, an' I am grateful to you."

"Well, we'll have to call it even, then," Worthington smiled.

"All right," Merlin said. "That's settled, an', moreover, I want you to stay as long as you can with us. I don't say it to flatter you, but you are good company for us all, an' I'm deep in your debt."

That night, in his room, Worthington wrote a letter home to a close friend:

I don't know that I ever shall care to live up there again [was among the things confided]. I love it here among these simple, crude people. I am not sure but I may make a confidential announcement to you before long that will surprise you. Can you guess, old chap? Fate seems unusually kind to me of late—but I'll let you know some time. Well, didn't you once say to me that it was *just as easy for a man to love a woman with means as*

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without? I thought that was absurd then, but—well, guess—guess, old chap. And, on top of it all, what if the woman were young, bright, original, and very pretty? . . . I am glad you liked the letter I published in the home paper. I myself thought it was rather graphic, and I should have been glad to hear Mr. Quincy read it, as you did, from his pulpit. No, I assure you I was not exaggerating—that is, to any great extent, anyway. It is a fact that the ex-slaves—many of them, at least—do not yet realize that they are free, for they stupidly, or under some form of persuasion, still remain with their former masters; and many of them, I feel certain, work without stated wages. I am not sure that I overstepped the truth when I said that a few of them were whipped into submission.

Oh yes, as I said in that letter, there is a big chance for humanitarian work here, and I intend to do some of it myself. . . . Don't mention my half-revealed secret, for a while, anyway. I may soon bring her up to see you all. It is not absolutely settled yet, but I assure you that the outlook is fine. As for Alice—well, please don't write to me about her again. We were ideally congenial, but she is penniless, and so am I. You needn't have told me of her depressed manner, for I know how the dear girl feels. I don't think she will ever marry. She told me she would never care for any one else, and I believe her. Our parting from each other was highly sensible, though, as you say, I think women take such things more to heart than men.

Worthington smiled as he sealed his letter and put it into his pocket.

One morning in July a dapper mulatto came up from the railway station. He wore up-to-date clothing of fine quality, carried a silk umbrella tightly rolled, and twirled it in his fingers like a cane.

"Lawdy, mercy!" Mrs. Dill cried out, as he entered the front gate and sauntered up the walk. "'Drew, who do you think has come? Joe, the black fellow you set free!"

"Well, well, well!" Merlin exclaimed, as he thumped to the door and crossed the veranda to shake hands. "Whar did you blow in from?"

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"Boston," the negro laughed. "Been wantin' ter come er long time, Marse Merlin, but couldn't manage it till de war was over. How is y'-all?"

Joe seated himself on the top step of the veranda as Merlin took a chair and told him of the changes that had taken place in his family. "How is your wife, Joe?" Merlin ended by asking.

"Fine as split silk, Marse Merlin, en de boy, too. We got a good-sized un now—named 'im atter you, too, suh. Yas-suh, Andrew Merlin, who give his daddy freedom. I'm named Merlin, too, suh. I had my choice 'twixt dat en Wilmot. De las' come fus' wid me, en Delia wanted it, too."

The family gathered—Anne, the Dills, and Worthington—and sat on the veranda listening to the negro's story of his Northern experiences. He and his wife both were earning good wages as help in a big hotel.

"Yes," he added, "I was homesick ter see y'-all, but I got some'n' else ter do down here. I've been on de track er my mother, en at last I foun' 'er. She is over in de next county en all erlone. I'm gwine ter go git 'er en take 'er back wid me. I done wrote 'er er letter ter git ready en she's anxious ter go."

As Joe wished to stay awhile at Delbridge, Andrew let him occupy his old quarters in the backyard, and he was fed, as formerly, in the kitchen, by Mrs. Dill, who never tired of asking questions about Boston and receiving the voluble replies which the negro had on the tip of his tongue.

CHAPTER V

“**W**HAT did I tell you?” Merlin asked, one morning, as he chuckled over a letter which Worthington had brought to him from the post-office and which he read as he sat with Anne and Dill in the parlor. “Didn’t I tell you that Foster was in cahoot with my old marble layout? This is from McCormack. He thinks he is pulling the wool over my eyes, but I see clean through him. He don’t know that I used to make note of every twist and kink in his trading ways, down to the smallest item. You see, Foster has had time to get back and report that I still own the property, and this is the roundabout, shifting way old Mack starts his ball rolling:

“DEAR MERLIN [Andrew read aloud]: You will be surprised to hear from me after this long silence. It seems a long time since I was interested in that little marble deal with you, doesn’t it? Well, Providence must have been guiding me, for if I had made the investment it would no doubt have been a losing game, for developments in Tennessee and Kentucky in that line now show the futility of trying to make money out of the inferior stone you and I were planning to put on the market. The delay, too, has given me another opening—down in your country, by the way—out of which I hope to make a big slice of money. I see no reason why I may not tell you about this. I have run across some beds of phosphates in Florida, on which I managed to get a binding option. I am going down there next week, and as Delbridge is directly on my way I am going to stop over and shake hands, for the sake of old times. Our business, of course, is over, but we can, I’m sure, remain the friends we always were.”

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Andrew did not finish reading the letter, for he was laughing freely now. "Ain't Mack a silly fool to think he is hoodwinking me?" he asked Anne. "But it is just like him. He's as hard as flint—never had a bit of use for anybody he couldn't make money out of, and yet he is going to bother to stop over to see me on his important trip. He writes me that he has a big deal on in phosphate deposits—why, the scamp never told a soul about a plan of his in all his life."

"What do you think he wants to see you about, then?" Anne inquired.

"Huh! you wouldn't ax if you knowed Mack as well as I do," Andrew returned. "Why, he wants to fetch up our deal ag'in, that's all; but he will do it in a roundabout way. Don't you notice that him and Foster both mentioned about quarries in Tennessee and Kentucky? And how did he know that I was still alive if Foster didn't tell him? Foster had retired from business, and yet he knowed about Tennessee and Kentucky marble. As for that, I've been making inquiries, and from all I've heard the stone in them States can't hold a candle to mine in quality or quantity. Well, when Mack gets here I'll have some fun, and if I don't yank a wad of cash out of him I'll be badly mistaken."

That day, while making some purchases at a store in the Square, Andrew saw old Webb descending from his wagon on a street corner. The wagon was in a bad condition, the single horse poor, and the old man himself was dressed in very shabby clothing. Andrew went out and thumped across the street to him, extending his hand cordially.

"Hello!" he cried. "I heard you was back, Jimmy, and was laying off to go out to see you."

Old Webb put forth his scrawny hand, but with evident reluctance. "Well, I didn't send you a invite, 'Drew

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Merlin," he muttered. "And I hain't going to. Looks like you'd stay at home at a time when all decent citizens are ag'in' your brand o' men. You've won as you said you would; but this white country hain't ready yit to mix itself with the black, as folks say you want it to do."

"Oh, Jimmy, don't believe everything you hear!" Andrew said, taken aback and quite pained by the remark.

"But it's so!" the old man snarled. "Your house is a regular hotel for Yankees and free niggers, all nosin' about here and makin' fun of us in our plight. Listen to me, 'Drew Merlin, I was too old to tote a musket in the war, but I hain't too old to fight such whelps as you have about you. I have the respect of my neighbors, an' I don't want you to come nigh me. In one way we may be friends, but in another we are enemies to the knife."

"I see, I see, Jimmy," Andrew said, with a flickering stare of regret. "Well, you see, it is different on my side. Nothing at all stands betwixt you and me. In fact, you are one friend that I'll never pay back enough to if I live to be a hundred. Why, Jimmy, you backed me with your savings, and now you are like the rest of us—short of money. That's so, ain't it?"

"I hain't said a word about money!" was the irritated reply. "Your dern blue-coats stripped me of everything I had, but I hain't mentioned it. I reckon if I did you'd think I was hinting at you to pay me what you owe me, but I hain't thought of it."

"Well, that was what I was coming to see you about," Merlin said. "I hain't been able, so far, even to pay the interest, or to give you anything for all them supplies."

"I know, the bushwhackers got them," the old man snapped out. "I heard how they got on the track of 'em just after I left."

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"You are off thar, Jimmy; we saved every scrap of the stuff by a sly trick, and we got the full benefit of it. We'd 'a' starved if it hadn't been for you, Jimmy. I owe you for every pound you left, and, say, I see my way now to settling in full for all I'm due you. I'm going to dispose of that quarry after all, Jimmy. I see a deal headed this way that has meat in it. Now let's be friends like we used to be."

A light of faint financial hope struggled beneath the sullen shadows of the wrinkled face. "I want the money—I need it bad," Webb said. "My family is suffering awful. If you *do* get the money and pay me, let it be like one man paying another a just debt—not a mark of friendship. I know my own mind an' feelin's, an' I don't want to be on a intimate footin' with any man that fought ag'in' me an' mine as you done, an' I won't! I say I won't!"

"All right, Jimmy." Andrew smiled ruefully. "But your bark is worse than your bite, old man. The truth is, you trusted me when nobody else would, in spite of my politics, and I'm your friend whether you are mine or not. I think I'll fetch you a roll of cash one of these days that will help you out of some of your kinks."

Without further words they parted. The bent old waif of circumstances left his old, sway-backed horse unhitched at the sidewalk, and without another glance at his grateful friend he entered the doorway of a warehouse.

Andrew had reached the opposite side of the Square on his way home when he heard a slight commotion behind him. A group was gathering in front of the post-office; persons were hurrying out of the law offices and stores and standing around a carriage from which an erect, soldierly gentleman was alighting. It was General Merlin in the plainest of planter's home-woven attire. Cheers were given, three of them, and hats were thrown into

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the air, as the ex-soldier grasped the hands that were held out to him, and removed his own hat because other heads were uncovered.

With a feeling of inexpressible loneliness Andrew turned away and slowly hobbled homeward, passing houses from the curtained windows of which women and children peered at him with contempt and derision.

CHAPTER VI

MCCORMACK, and a man whom he introduced as a Mr. Mandrake, one of the head men in the phosphate venture, arrived a little sooner than Merlin expected. They brought with them large traveling-bags of the newest pattern, and they wore stylish clothing of fine texture and conspicuous jewelry. Indeed, their contrast to their surroundings was great, and Merlin was sure they had attracted much attention as they passed through the Square and the streets leading to his house. Andrew met them at the door himself, and invited them into the parlor. The fact that McCormack at the first sight of him showed no surprise over his lameness was additional proof to the shrewd Southerner that Foster had already spoken of it. Andrew smiled to himself, for he was more and more convinced that he was not mistaken as to the would-be hidden intentions of his visitors.

"We are all fagged out, 'Drew," McCormack went on, in his old familiar way. "The train through Tennessee broke down three or four times. Would you believe it, Man' and I actually got out twice and helped throw wood into the tender of the engine? I guess we will stay a day or two with you, if there is a hotel here that will accommodate us."

Merlin frankly explained the prejudice against Northerners at the village hotel, mentioning the experiences Worthington had encountered, and ended by saying: "I reckon we can stow you away up-stairs, if you both will sleep in the same bed, an' we'll feed you as well as we can on country fare."

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The visitors accepted with alacrity. "Good, good!" McCormack exclaimed, rubbing his hands together. "It will give us a better chance to talk over old times. I wish, 'Drew, that I could have got an opening for you in this new deal of ours; but as soon as the chance came up Man' and the rest of the fellows jumped into all the vacancies."

"Oh, I couldn't go in, anyway," Merlin returned, and as he spoke his twinkling eyes rested on Dill's face. "The truth is, Mack, I'm like you fellers up thar. The war's end seems to have livened up my interests, too. I've got my hands full, I tell you. I may not look busy, but I never was more so in my life."

"You mean farming, I presume?" McCormack suppressed an exhibition of the surprise which seemed to ooze into him from external sources.

"Oh no!" Andrew now actually winked at his old army comrade with the eye that was out of McCormack's range, while its mate held a placid, non-committal stare. "I never was good at farmin'. Tradin' in mineral properties is the only thing I care for."

"Oh, I see—I see!" but the Northerner's groping tone indicated that he was unpleasantly mystified. There was a pause, due to his lack of ready verbal invention, and then he added: "On the way down, as I looked out of the car-window, 'Drew, and saw the forests along the line, it struck me that the wood on your marble property might, in years to come, bring some sort of price."

"Oh, I've thought o' that, Mack!" A smile to which Dill's ferret eyes penetrated lurked beneath the exterior of Merlin's face. "In fact, the fellers I expect to close with at any minute now are a-goin' to exempt all timber an' farmin' rights. They are a-goin' to buy jest the mineral interests."

Consternation played havoc on the facial fields of the two visitors. They dared not exchange glances with each

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other. They scarcely dared look straight at the speaker, who was uttering such astounding things so casually.

"Why, I didn't know that you had anything in view in—in the trading line." McCormack held the reins of the talk flabbily. "I thought that the openings in those other States would discourage you. I know they would me."

"Maybe they would *you*, but not *me*." Merlin smiled contentedly. "I'm glad other stone is goin' on the market, for mine beats any above or under the ground. Since our deal split up, Mack, I've found that instead of just lying in shallow, bed-like sheets my stone gets wider and deeper every foot you go. I've got a mountain of it, and the purty part about it is that the richer it gets the closer it lies to the railroad. They are going to run a new branch of track from the mouth of the river to the old junction, and it will cut smack-dab through my land. I'm glad you come along, Mack, for I hain't had a chance to talk about such things with anybody down here. But tell me about your own big scheme. I know you will make a pile out of it, for you've got a head for values, and you ain't no fool when it comes to dickering with men, either. I wish I had your knack. I reckon your idea is to use your phosphates for fertilizing?"

"Yes, yes, that is *part* of it." McCormack was so stunned and bewildered by what he had heard that he was thrown from the equipoise which had been his in all former transactions. "Yes, we'll tell you more about it after a while. Man' and I are tired out. I wonder if we could go to our room now?"

"Oh yes, of course," Merlin said, quickly. "Dill, you've got two sound legs. Tell your wife, please, to show these gentlemen to the'r quarters."

When the two visitors, carrying their bags, had gone up-stairs Dill turned to his friend with a tentative, wide-spreading smile. "You cap the stack, 'Drew," he said.

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"When you spoke o' that sale you had on you lied with sech a smooth face I almost believed you myself."

"I wasn't lyin', Mart." Merlin seemed to debate within himself if he really were lying or not. "You never ketched me in a lie in your life, Mart. I wouldn't tell a lie in cold blood even to put this big deal through. No, as I see it, Mart, I wasn't lyin'. I tol' 'im, didn't I, that I *expected* at any minute to close a deal with some fellers and exempt the timber an' farmin' rights?"

"Oh yes, I remember now," Dill answered. "You see, you hadn't never mentioned to me the offer you'd had, an'—"

"Mack an' his bunch are the fellers I expect to deal with." Andrew smiled broadly. "I expected it when I said it, an' I'm dead sure of it now. Did you notice how plumb flabbergasted they both was? Don't you think two nabobs, in shining shirt-fronts and flowered silk vests, about to get rich on phosphates, ought not to have got as white about the gills as them two fish done just now? Do you know why they wanted to go to their room? It was to get the'r bearings. I've seed old Mack get out of many a tight hole, but he was scrambling like a mule in quicksand just now. A little more and he'd have bellowed for help. When he seed the run-down condition of this town, and my peg-leg, he thought I'd fall at his feet at the sight of a twenty-five-cent shin-plaster. You know what he meant by mentioning the timber on my land, don't you? Old Mack was getting ready to say, in his free-and-easy, tired-out way, that he would be willing to buy the land for the sake of the timber. He would have offered little or nothing, but I hit him a swipe that keeled him clean over. He hardly knows what to say now, and if death was peeping at him straight in the face he couldn't be more miserable than he is right now. He don't know whar I stand, an' he hain't sure of his own foothold. Mart, if you want to deal with sharpers like him, you must

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act like a fool, while you talk like a sage of old. If thar was the least bit of brag in what I said, it wouldn't go down with Mack; but, you see, I just kept talking like—well, like he's in phosphates and I'm in marble, and that I feel so satisfied with my own good luck that I'm happy to hear he's struck oil, too."

"I see now," Martin smiled. "An' you hain't lyin', as you look at it."

"No, I hain't lyin', Mart—that is, I hain't lyin' *any to hurt*, for I hain't doin' this thing for any personal gain. Mart, that little girl o' mine has suffered an' is sufferin' a lot on my account, an' my whole aim is to lay this money at her feet. Mack an' all his gang would not lend her a dollar if I was dead an' gone. They have got plenty, an' I am doin' no harm to work 'em the best I can. It's fire fightin' fire—p'ison to kill p'ison. Mack has robbed many a widow an' orphan by legal methods, an' he hain't comin' down here, after all Anne's been through, an' take *one single penny* that I kin secure for her."

CHAPTER VII

THAT evening after supper, as they all sat on the veranda, the conversation showed itself to be a lame, spiritless affair indeed. McCormack, it seemed, hardly knew how to reintroduce the matter which concerned him to the exclusion of all else, and Merlin saw to it, wisely, that it should not come up from any false step of his own. He was in a lively mood, and was willing for his old associate to fancy that it was due to many as yet unrevealed facts pertaining to his financial good fortune. He persuaded Worthington and Anne to sing for the company, but even the pleasing duets from the candle-lighted parlor which came through the big open windows failed to cheer up the two new-comers.

Presently a diversion was furnished by the sound of a loud, resonant voice from the nearest street corner, blended with hand-clapping and mellow and guttural exclamations of applause.

"It's Joe speakin' to the niggers," Mrs. Dill explained. "I heard him last night. He's got to be a regular public orator. The niggers think he's great. When he is in Boston he says he speaks about the South, and down here he intends to tell the darkies about life in the North."

"Oh, that is interesting!" McCormack roused himself to say. "I wonder if Man' and I hadn't better go out and listen?"

"We can all go, as for that matter," Merlin proposed. "I've been telling the fool to keep his mouth shut while he is here, but he won't. The Kuklux have organized all

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around here, and Joe is just the sort of game they are after. As I told him, the war is over, and the best thing for him is to lie low and not stir up strife. The South has already had as much as it can stand up under with any sort of patience."

They all went out of the yard in the moonlight down to the street corner where, on an inverted dry-goods box, Joe stood surrounded by forty or fifty negroes. The party of whites had approached from the rear, and Joe was not aware of their presence, otherwise his oratory might have been checked by the sight of the one white man whose opinion he valued above all others.

"What y'-all got ter do," Joe was saying, sharply, "is ter put yo' flat foot down on yo' legal rights en stan' fer um ef de sky fall on yer lak er load er bricks f'um er dump-cart. Dis big government done set you free wid its blood, en it's gwine ter see to it dat yer gits yo' rights. Y'-all is 'fraid er de Kuklux, en I don't blame yer much, fer ef dar is anything dat is calculate' ter make de blood of a cullud man run cold it is dem white ghosts wid caps on, en hangin'-ropes in deir clutch. But yer must put up wid dem, too, ef you gwine stan' fer yo' rights, as new, free men."

"Heigh there! Get off that box, you black whelp, or we—" The remainder of the command was lost in the crash of a stone against the box Joe stood on, and other stones whistled over his head and some fell among the bystanders.

"Dat de white-trash devils now!" Joe yelled out as he dodged.

"Get down there, you black scamp!" a voice commanded, and a brickbat struck Joe on the shoulder and glanced off into the crowd. Yells from many voices were heard, growing nearer with the increasing clatter of feet. A pistol was fired not far away, another and another.

"Run, Anne—you an' Mrs. Dill!" Andrew cried out,

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and he caught the girl by the arm and swung himself along in the direction of home. "This may be a general riot, an' you'll git hit!"

The entire party hastened away from the spot where, strange to say, the most of the negroes stubbornly stood, perhaps because the bruised speaker was still on the box, urging them to fight rather than run.

"Good Lord! they are a lot of heathens!" Anne heard Worthington muttering, in a tone that quivered as from fear, as he hastened along by her side. "Why, they would as soon kill us as not! They were firing right into the crowd!"

Here they met Arthur Preston, who had dashed from the gate of his home and was hurrying toward the throng on the corner. For an instant he checked his speed as he recognized Anne. "Hurry in!" he said, in the tone of a man commanding a child that was in danger. "Hundreds of shots may be fired in a minute if the negroes don't disperse."

On he ran. Glancing over their shoulders, after him, they saw him plunge into the group of negroes. He seemed to be striking right and left with his hands, and pushing and pulling them.

"Go home, Cato, Sam, Jake, all of you!" they heard him crying out. "Fools! they will fill you full of holes. The town is alive with Kuklux! Hurry, you black rascals, hurry! They will burn you alive!"

He was successful. In the moonlight the negroes were seen separating and slinking off in several directions. The speaker had descended from his box and stood by Arthur's side, as if trying to explain something.

"What has Captain Preston got to do with it?" Worthington asked, insinuatingly. "Does he mean to imply that these freedmen haven't a right to the public highway, the same as the whites would have? What right has he to order them about as if they were a lot of dogs?"

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"That young feller knows powerful well what he is about," Andrew answered, in a tone of warm approval. "He has saved more than one black hide to-night, and he done it at the risk of his life, too. He throwed himself right into whar lead balls was about to be as thick as gnats in August. Them shots we heard was just the beginning of what might 'a' been wholesale slaughter."

As they reached the gate they saw Preston returning in the wake of several negroes whom he seemed to be driving in front of him. He might have overtaken Merlin's party, but he had made no effort to do so. Anne heard the iron latch of his gate click, and without looking back knew that he had entered his own yard. She felt that he was safe and a vague sensation of relief came over her, a sensation which produced a warmth of her face and unaccountably irritated her. What did she care about his safety or his danger, she asked herself, after all that he had done and been that was contrary to her desires and approval?

They all resumed their seats on the veranda. There was much talk about the affair among the Southerners and Worthington, who was still incensed; but Mandrake and his associate entered into it scarcely at all. This Merlin noticed, and once, sitting close to Dill, he nudged his old comrade gently and said:

"Mack, I hope you will find less of this sort of excitement down at your phosphate-beds. I don't know how Florida is, but if it is like this you'll have to change your politics or be in a stew all the time."

But McCormack, while not at all disturbed over race-riots, seemed to have lost some of the zest which had inspired his early talk of his new venture, and made no reply.

The village was quiet now, and the entire group went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

SHORTLY after breakfast the next morning McCormack, with an eye which somehow wavered in its glance, and a voice which indicated a certain loss of assurance, approached Merlin on the veranda, whither Andrew had gone with the distinct intuition that he would be followed. McCormack held out a cigar to his host, but Andrew waved it aside.

"I chaw, but I don't smoke," he said. "You ought to remember that, Mack."

"I didn't know but what you had taken it up during the war," the other said, absently. He coughed after he had struck a match, the burning sulphur of which affected the membrane of his throat, for incautiously he was holding it too close to his nostrils. "'Drew," he began, "Man' and I had a long, serious talk last night after we went up-stairs."

The Northerner coughed again, and a subtle light of full insight into what was coming began to burn in Merlin's eyes. "I kin imagine it, Mack," he answered, promptly. "A racket of that sort is calculated to make any stranger serious. You come 'in an inch o' bein' mixed up in a bloody riot. Yes, it was serious for you, an' yore phosphate partner, too. If them mountain fellers had got started, an' knowed that you two was from New York, thar is no tellin' what—"

"Oh, it wasn't about that!" McCormack broke in, with a touch of impatience over Merlin's density. "'Drew, the truth is that Man' and I—well, I guess we are no more

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than human, 'Drew, and to be honest, when you spoke of the fine quality of your marble, and—and your immediate prospects of selling out—well, as I say, we are no more than human, and most men are inclined to want what somebody else is after."

"I see, Mack; I'm that way myself." Merlin refused to be tied to any purpose other than his own. "I once wanted to buy a 'White Chester' sow with a litter of snow-white pigs that had captured the blue ribbon at the county fair and was up for sale to the highest bidder. I wanted them to breed from, and I made what I thought was as high a bid as I'd go under any circumstances. But, la, me! the minute some of my neighbors begun to bid, and I thought of them pigs getting fat in some other feller's pen—well, I bid, and I bid, till all the rest fell back, astonished, and I got 'em. I can't say I was dissatisfied with the deal, either. They called me 'White Chester Merlin' all about through the country after that, for I kept a stock of 'em, an' seed the increase spread all over the county. It didn't seem to take half as much to fatten 'em, an' we'd all got tired o' the razorback brand of hog that et us out of house an' home, an' scratched the fat off ag'in' the rocks an' trees. I've knowed a long, slim hog to scratch his back under the house till you'd think a sawmill was under thar at work on the sleepers."

McCormack seemed to have lost some of his former appreciation for Andrew's quaint stories, for he only frowned now, and seemed to be busy planning an oral structure of some sort.

"Yes, we talked it over, Man' and I did," he went on, "and, as I say, 'Drew, we are nothing more than human. The truth is, we've made up our minds, after all, that we'd like to buy your marble property, if it can be had at a reasonable price."

"Why, you don't mean to tell me, Mack," Andrew said, with a fine show of astonishment, "that you want

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to git into this along with your big phosphate enterprise? It looks like that 'u'd keep your hands full."

"If you will know the truth, 'Drew," and McCormack was evidently speaking the truth now, "we've got plenty of money back of us. We don't often speak of it, but some of us made a lot by the rise in food-prices during the war. We got hold of first-hand information, and profited by it. As it is, you see, I could look after this end of the thing, and Man' could attend to—to—to—"

"The phosphate-beds." Andrew mouthed the words as if their very sound were a source of subtle amusement to him.

"Yes, that's it, 'Drew. In fact, the Florida investment was Man's pet idea, anyway, and you know I went pretty thoroughly into the investigation of the marble field when this thing was up before. It seems to me that my old interest has got hold of me again."

"A thing like that *will* happen sometimes," answered the Southerner. "Well, Mack, you'll have to talk straight to me. I used to pay out railroad fare an' hotel bills to git to talk to you, but that day is over. What is it you want?"

"Why, I want to know—I want to know—and I am speaking for Man' and the rest—I'd like to know, 'Drew, what sort of an offer you have received for the marble tract."

"Oh, I see!" and here Andrew allowed himself to laugh freely. "You don' want much, Mack, do you? Well, what if I was to tell you that I hain't a-goin' to make you any statement on that line at all—none at all?"

"You mean that the thing's gone too far?" McCormack said, with a catch in his breath.

"Oh no, Mack," Andrew answered. "I'm still my own boss. I could sell to you if I would, but I don't like to see fellows I deal with have quite so many irons in the fire as you have, for whoever takes hold of my marble

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tract must develop it. I want to help this county out, and I don't want to sell to anybody that will lie down on the property and wait years and years to open it up. I want to furnish labor to these poor mountain folks, for they need it bad."

"Oh, we'd open it at once, 'Drew," McCormack said, with unbusiness-like eagerness. "It all depends on your valuation. What is the lowest cash price?"

Andrew pulled at the strap on his wooden leg to fix it more firmly on his thigh, thrusting a steady finger under a buckle to straighten out a fold in the cloth of his trousers.

"Are you in any special hurry, Mack?" he asked, as if he had a thousand matters to adjust and the tense man at his side were in the South on a pleasure trip.

"Well, yes, 'Drew," the other answered. "We are losing time here. We ought to—to be going on to—to Florida."

"Couldn't you stop over on your way back?" Andrew's trading method had mellowed in its subtleness. The bland stare of his kindly eyes seemed to hold a gentle, personal appeal. And who, McCormack asked himself, could be like that save a man who was trying to elude an embarrassing proposal?

"We'd rather know now," he insisted. "We want to write back to the others and explain things. What is your lowest price, 'Drew?"

"For a half or a whole interest?" Merlin inquired.

"Why a whole, of course!" in a tone of surprise. "Were you thinking of retaining a part, 'Drew?"

"Well, I'd like to if I could git just the right sort of partners, for the future of that property is immense! immense, I tell you."

"We want the whole thing, 'Drew—nothing else would interest us. Now what is your lowest price?"

"If I'll tell you out an' out, will you make me a solemn promise, Mack?"

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"Why, yes, of course—that is, I see no reason not to. What do you want me to promise, 'Drew?'"

"Why, I'll state a price as the first, last, an' only one I'll make, Mack, provided that you won't ask me to fall from it. I'm a one-price man. I don't want to dicker over this matter like me 'n' you used to do. I'm plumb done with all that. After I've stated my terms, if you don't like 'em, you are to say so, an' go on about your other business. Will that suit you, or won't it?"

The Northerner stared helplessly, his wily face the mirror of many conflicting thoughts.

"Well, I agree, 'Drew," he finally answered. "Now what is the offer?"

"I've got two of 'em," Andrew said. "You kin take your choice. The fust is a half interest at fifty thousand cash; the other is a hundred an' ten thousand cash for the whole thing, lock, stock, an' barrel."

"Whew!" McCormack whistled, and was about to protest loudly, when Andrew raised his hand.

"Remember your promise," he demanded, firmly. "No more shilly-shallying in mine! Take one o' them two offers or drap the thing. I know whar I stand, an' I've put you whar you got to stand if you are goin' to deal with me."

McCormack pulled at his dead cigar in utter confusion. Once or twice he started to speak, but, remembering his agreement, he checked himself. In all his dealings with various types of men he had never met one quite so difficult of solution as this simple man had suddenly become.

"I said I'd not ask you to take less than you asked," he all but fumed, "but I can say that the price is too high."

"Well, I like to have you speak of it that way, Mack, for you see we kin part as friends now. You know what you can afford to pay, an' I know what I'm willin' to take. You may call the price high, and do you know I hope it

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is! You see, Mack, old boy, if I didn't git a fair chunk o' money out o' this now, an' later somebody else got rich on it, I'd think that Providence was blind. You admit that you fellers who didn't go in the war set back on your haunches up thar an' made money on the very food the rest had to eat, while me an' some more left our women folks to starve while we did our duty to our country the best we could. Now I went in an' lost a leg. I lost a dear wife. I lost a noble boy, an only son that was my pride. I lost that boy's love an' respect. I lost the regard of my only brother. I lost the friendship of mighty nigh every man, woman, an' child here in the country I love. The only thing I saved out of the wreck is my daughter, an' the public is ag'in' her because she stuck to me. Every dollar of this marble money is goin' to Anne. It may help some to pay her for what she has suffered an' is sufferin', an', honest, Mack—you know I'm a man o' my word; I never say a thing an' back down from it. You know that by this time, an' I tell you now that one word more from you an' I'll slap my price up to a hundred an' fifty, an' let it stay thar as far as *you* are concerned."

The baffled speculator stared dumbly for a moment. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he said: "Man' is up-stairs, 'Drew; let me run up and speak to him. I'll be down in a minute. I don't know what to say. I don't really know what to do in the matter."

"Go ahead, go ahead. I'm in no hurry, Mack." Merlin smiled easily. "The Lord knows I'm not asking you to buy my property."

Five minutes later McCormack and Mandrake descended the stairs together, finding Merlin seated near the end of the veranda, his placid stare on the distant mountain-top.

"We have decided to ask you this, 'Drew," McCormack began, quite in the tone of a man who understood that an inevitable thing had to be properly met and dis-

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posed of. "We have decided to ask you how much time you will give us to accept your hundred-and-ten proposition?"

"Time?" Andrew shrugged, sniffed, and smiled. "Don't ask me to sign one of your options, Mack. I'll never look at one ag'in. If you fellers hadn't backed out of the last one I signed for you, my great-grandchildren would have had to fight it in court."

"I don't mean an option, 'Drew." McCormack took no part in Merlin's smile. "We'll simply take your word for it. How much time will you give us—a month?"

"Yes, and ten days of grace besides, Mack. Will that suit you?"

"Yes. We are going to Atlanta to-night. We want to write to the others. I'll be back here within the time agreed on and let you know positively one way or another. I don't know what we'll do yet, but I know you will keep your word and wait on us."

The two Northerners went for a walk and Andrew hobbled into the kitchen where Dill sat watching his wife and Anne at work. He said nothing to the two women, but when he had caught his old comrade's eye he stealthily signaled for him to follow him outside.

"Anything in the wind?" Martin asked, in concern. "Kuklux?"

"Not exactly, but they *are* on the war-path, Mart." He then explained the financial proposition he had made and watched Dill's eyes fill with respectful awe.

"Gosh! a hundred an' ten!" Dill exclaimed. "You have tuck the bit in your teeth, 'Drew. Do you reckon they will take you up?"

"That I can't answer," Merlin said, seriously. "I took the risk, an' I'm goin' to abide by it. I won't worry much one way or another. The property is all right, an' Anne will git the benefit of it some day, whether these skinflints buy it or not."

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The visitors left that night. In parting from Merlin at the door, McCormack simply said: "You shall hear from us within the stated time, 'Drew. I don't know what the others will see fit to do. It is a big pile of ready money for such hard times as these."

CHAPTER IX

WORTHINGTON was a silent and curious spectator of much that was passing between the two Northerners and his host. In one way or another he had associated them with Merlin's marble property, and he knew from their opulent appearance and habits that they were capitalists, who had not made the journey to such an out-of-the-way place in such unsettled times without an important object in view. He had purposely stood at a window of the parlor and overheard McCormack's parting words at the door in regard to his final decision, and the hint of the large sum of money involved. What the amount was Worthington could not guess, but that it was considerable he did not doubt.

He was disturbed to the point of agitation. He told himself that he had not made the progress in his affair with Anne that he ought to have made, when his splendid opportunity was considered, and now a peculiarly embarrassing situation had unexpectedly presented itself. He had not, as yet, declared himself, and if he waited till the property was sold his doing so then might have a mercenary appearance that would be awkward. Yes, he must declare his intentions at once. For several hours he debated with himself whether he should speak first to Anne or to her father. He had heard that it was a custom in the South for the parents of a young lady to be consulted in such matters, but, somehow, he dreaded a talk of that particular nature with the girl's father. He had

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always found that he made love easily, and he felt that he had made himself adroitly agreeable to Anne. It certainly would be easier to speak first to her, but he did not want to run the slightest risk of offending her father, so he finally decided on formally asking Merlin for his consent to his attentions to Anne, with the purpose of eventually making her his wife.

Accordingly, that evening, after supper, when he saw Andrew alone on the lawn he went out to him.

"A little bit hot inside, ain't it?" Andrew asked. "You ought to throw off your coat like I do, Mr. Worthington. I'd as soon have on a strait-jacket as the thick thing you got buttoned around you."

Worthington smiled thinly. "I don't seem to feel it much," he said, "though you look comfortable enough."

"You Yankees are different from us," Merlin returned. "Mack an' his friend kept their coats on even in the middle o' the day, when it was hot enough to bake a potato in the sun. Well, I've got them fellers whar I want 'em, Mr. Worthington. You don't know what they came down here for, I reckon?"

Worthington scented confidential revelations, and they were exactly what he wanted to avoid. One minute more and the proposal he had in view would appear awkward, to say the least. He decided to act quickly. He decided to appear even obtuse to Merlin's half question, and then he decided to appear even more agitated than he really was, for surely, after all, agitation at such a serious moment was a sign of modesty, and the average father ought to appreciate modesty on the part of a penniless man asking for the hand of an only daughter who was a prospective heiress.

"I'm in considerable trouble, Mr. Merlin," and Worthington had no sooner uttered the words than he saw their value as an opening for what he had to say.

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"Oh, I'm sorry!" Andrew returned. "I hate to hear of trouble, and right now when I am feeling especially good over my own—"

"I didn't expect just this sort of trouble, Mr. Merlin," Worthington broke in, with a twinge of alarm over the persistence of his host's thoughts. "I was 'heart whole and fancy free' when I came down here, but now I am in love, and I call it trouble because I don't yet know what my chances are. I think you can guess what I'm going to say, Mr. Merlin?"

"Well, I can't say that I do." Andrew stared in surprise. "That is, unless—unless—but shucks! I don't believe you can mean that—"

"Yes, it is your daughter, Mr. Merlin. I haven't spoken to her yet. I felt that in such a serious matter I ought not to act hastily. I recognize the great honor you did me in taking me into your family circle, and I feel that I have no right even to advance my interests without your being made aware of my hopes and approving of them."

"Approving of them!" Andrew stared from widening eyes, as if rousing from a sort of apathy. "Why, why, I'm so astonished, Mr. Worthington, that I hardly know what to say."

"I thought that it might strike you so," Worthington pursued, in the tone of general humility which he had decided was particularly effective in the dubious situation. "As I said, Mr. Merlin, I haven't even broached the matter to Anne, though I have been sorely tempted to do so."

"Miss Anne, if you please!" Andrew coldly rebuked him. "I don't want to be too particular, sir, but it is customary, here in the South, for young ladies to be addressed by that title by anybody that hain't known 'em a long time."

"Pardon me," Worthington faltered. "It slipped out,

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Mr. Merlin. I assure you that I have never been so familiar with her personally."

"I hope not," Andrew said, frigidly. "I imagine she would give 'most any feller his walkin'-papers if he was as forward as that on such a short acquaintance."

"I'm afraid I have offended you, Mr. Merlin," Worthington stumbled in his utterance, "and I hope you will forgive me."

"I'll try to—I'll try to," Merlin answered, avoiding the young man's flurried stare. "I want to be fair to you, an' I will if I possibly can. Now see here, I may be at fault, an' I'm in the habit o' diggin' down deep in myse'f to see whether I'm right or wrong in a matter, an' I say, I may be wrong now; but to tell you the truth I hain't just ready to think o' givin' my daughter up to any man alive yet. You see, that may be powerful selfish, but I can't help it. I've lost everything else but her, an' it sort o' goes against the grain right at present to—to— Oh, I may be jealous—I may be too suspicious for my own good, I don't know. Lord! Lord! young man, if you ever have a daughter an' are tied to her as tight as I am to mine you will understand how it feels to have a feller that is almost a plumb stranger lookin' you in the face an' proposin' to marry her, right when you are counting on great big— But, of course, you don't know about McCormack's plans and what may turn up any day."

"McCormack—McCormack?" Worthington contracted his brows as naturally as a skilled diplomatist could have done. "What has *he* to do with it?"

"Oh, well, never mind that now!" Andrew lightly threw the matter off. "I may tell you about him later. I want to be fair to you. You've done me a whopping big favor in teaching my daughter as you have, and I appreciate the deed to the fullest extent. But that hain't a thing to do with what you are now after. I hain't goin' to ask you if Anne has showed you any preference, for I

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know her well enough to know that if she had any leanin' that-a-way she would have throwed out some little sign of it. I don't say she would 'a' told me in so many words, but I'd 'a' knowed—I'd 'a' knowed! I reckon all girls have a sneakin' fancy for some chap or other, an' I used to think that Anne an' a certain other young feller close by was cuttin' their eyes at one another, but nothin' has come of it, so far, an' nothin' may ever come of it, for they seem wider apart to-day than they ever have been, as far as I can judge."

"I think I know to whom you refer," said Worthington. "It worried me a good deal at one time, but I soon saw that she had too much family and patriotic pride to allow herself to care for a man whose views are so far beneath yours and hers."

"Well, let's not talk about him, if you *do* know who I mean," Andrew said. "Now you have made me a respectful proposition, Mr. Worthington, an' I can do no less, as a man an' a gentleman, than treat it with respect, as hard as it is for me to think o' the matter at all. As I take it, you are just asking permission to go ahead an' see how you stand with Anne. I see no great harm in it, for whatever she does will be done wisely; but, still, some sort o' understandin' ought to be had betwixt me an' you, if we are to remain friendly an' you are to stay on here. May I ask if you have made up your mind to remain in the South—even in case you do—do get a wife to suit you?"

"I don't think so now, Mr. Merlin," answered the Northerner. "To be candid, I don't think that An—that *Miss* Anne ought to do so, either. To expect her to stay here under the present conditions would be expecting too much of any refined, gentle girl. There is one thing, Mr. Merlin, that I thought I could offer her, and you, too—and that is a home in the North among people who would not deride you for your patriotism, but who

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would honor you for it and all you have suffered. That riot on the street corner the other night, which I have described as vividly as I can in one of my letters to my home paper, convinced me that this is no place for me, your daughter, or yourself to live in permanently. These people will never forgive you, and they will always heap opprobrium on your helpless daughter. My friends at home would receive you both with open arms. I haven't much to offer. I have not yet established myself in my profession, but I am young and healthy and full of hope."

"Humph!" Andrew sniffed. "So you think we'd turn tail an' leave here, do you? Shucks! You don't know us! If you expect to work on that line with Anne you'd as well drap it. You couldn't hire her to leave now; I'll bet on it. This is our home, an' we both love it."

"I only offered it as a suggestion," Worthington said, lamely. "I can live anywhere, provided that my hopes in regard to your daughter are realized. Everything depends on her, and—on *you*, Mr. Merlin."

Andrew was silent and thoughtful for fully a moment, then he shrugged his shoulders and said: "Now see here, Mr. Worthington. How will this suit you? I think I'd rather have a little time to study over this before giving my consent even to let you pay court to my daughter. Now suppose you let this rock on for, say, another month before you fetch it up with her. In the mean time, I'll give it due thought an' consideration. I suppose it is only natural for Anne to be expected to marry sooner or later, but I'm just weak an' silly enough not to want her to hurry to do it. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Yes, Mr. Merlin," the Northerner answered. "I can wait, and I must abide by your decision. I'd never think of trying to win your daughter without your approval. I've never seen a child more faithful to a parent than she is to you."

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"I know it," Andrew answered. "An' that's why I'll never force any preference of mine on her, either. She must pick for herself. I'll never try to influence her. I can't say I have anything against you, an' if I am sorter offish about what you want, it is jest because I hain't ready to think o' lettin' any man have my girl yet. But when she's ready I will be."

CHAPTER X

LEAVING Merlin on the lawn, Worthington walked past the window of the sitting-room, seeing Anne at work in the candle-light over one of her studies. She was young, beautiful, vivacious, and spirited. What a gem she was! She would adorn the career of any professional man, and besides she was to be wealthy. Her fortune would put him squarely on his feet, and, as it was now, he could not be accused of deliberate mercenary motives. How lucky it was that he had prevented her father from confiding what he already suspected in regard to his finances! Anne might be difficult to win; she had somehow made him feel that fact by her persistent reserve, by the studious, penetrating, Andrew-like gaze which she sometimes fixed on him when he was making indirect and subtle overtures to her in their mountain walks. Other girls, perhaps more impressionable, had allowed him to hold their hands, and even permitted him to kiss them, but had Anne been a royal princess, and he the lowest of her subjects, the gulf between them could not have been wider. And yet all that might be overcome. He told himself that without an open declaration he could show her the sort of delicate and repressed attentions that most women like, and in that way really lose no time in furthering his deep-set plan.

Andrew remained on the lawn, his troubled thoughts dwelling on the conversation he had just had with Worthington. Presently he saw Joe come around the corner from his domicile in the rear and make his way toward the gate.

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"Hello, Joe! Whar away in such a hurry?" Merlin called out, and the negro paused and turned.

"We-all is having er meetin' down in de grove, en dey done ax me ter 'dress um," was the slow reply. "Dey wanted Mr. Worthington ter speak, too, lak he done las' week, but he said he was too busy writin' articles on de cullud question fer de papers up Norf, so it all fall on me."

"I see, I see," Merlin said, sternly. "Now look here, Joe; I want to give you a piece of sound advice. The war is over, and these whites and blacks are doing their level best to settle down in some sort of harmony and work, and all your talk about the bad treatment of your race now and in the past hain't doing one bit of good. You had a sample of what the rough element of whites will do under provocation the other night. I didn't know that Mr. Worthington was in the habit of speaking to you folks or I would have warned him, too."

"Why, Marse Merlin—I say Marster ter you not beca'se you *is* my marster, you understan', but beca'se you used ter be, an' gimme my freedom—I want ter know, suh, is it possible, atter you done fought fer my race, dat yer gwine set still en leave um in ignorance? Why, suh, half of um don't know yit dat dey's free. Dey-all wants ter hear 'bout Boston, en I kin tell um er lot. I kin tell um, suh, dat dey kin walk inter any hotel, street-car, or restaurant in dat city, en hang up deir hats on de rack en ax er waiter ter fetch um ham en aigs or coffee—or—or anything dey kin pay fer."

"What do you want to tell 'em all *that* for?" Andrew asked, sharply. "You ought to know that that sort o' talk breeds dissatisfaction an' general no-account habits. Northern whites ain't a whit kinder to your folks than these very Southerners. I know, because I've been amongst 'em a lot. The South needs the labor o' the blacks, an' the blacks suit this climate. Take my advice an' let up

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on this thing, Joe. You've got a certain sort o' disease, my boy, an' it is common to all brains an' races—you love to hear the sound o' your own horn. Now do you know what you ought to do? You ought to go git that mammy o' yours an' git back to your wife. This whole race problem will be settled just as fast as the good Lord wants it settled, an' it is my private opinion that the devil uses low-grade orators of a certain brand more than any other agency of harm."

The ex-slave smiled and laughed incredulously. "Never you mind, Marse Merlin. You know *yo'* race, en I know *mine*. Le'me 'lone, suh; I knows what I'm erbout. I'm tellin' my people some things dat dey never will git f'um de white race."

Merlin was about to protest further, but with another good-natured laugh the negro turned to the gate and passed out. Andrew heard him muttering to himself and chuckling as he slouched down the street toward the Square.

"He'll git some sense beat into that thick skull of his, if he don't look out," Andrew mused. "I know the truth about some things, but makin' his sort see 'em is another proposition."

He was still standing on the lawn when Anne came out, looking for him. "I have finished my lessons," she said, putting her arm around his waist and resting her head on his shoulder.

With his broad hand he stroked her hair, and never before had he done it more tenderly, more reverently. "I've just been thinkin' about you, daughter," he said, softly. "I've been thinkin', an' thinkin', an' thinkin'."

"You have?" she laughed sweetly. "Do you think I am a bad girl?"

The hand on her hair rested still for a moment. She fancied a slight quiver passed through his frame, as was the case sometimes when the nerves of his wounded leg

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suddenly twitched in adjusting themselves to their new conditions.

"Bad? Bad?" he said, with a sniff. "You are the best daughter that God ever gave to a man in deep darkness and in long trouble. I've been wondering what you will do in the life that lies before you. Your mother married when she was as young as you are, and—and, as far as I can see, you are not giving the subject any thought."

Anne laughed, and yet she stared at him questioningly. "Don't talk to me of marriage, father. As long as I have you I'll never marry."

"Don't say that—I wouldn't want you to stay single," Andrew said, tremulously. "There are certain substantial joys granted every woman that she is entitled to by nature. I won't say what they are—you know what I mean. But, yes, I'll be plain, too. Thar is a time for a girl to have her doll-things; thar is a time for her to have her lover; an' thar is a time for her to have her husband and children. Do you think I'd want you to miss the chance—even if it's just a bare chance—of havin' what I've got in you? Why, child, Heaven couldn't give a yearnin' soul after earthly trials an' tribulations any more than God has given me in you, on top o' what I've been through. But I can't always keep you—that's plumb out of the question. I want you to marry, but I'd want *one* thing. I'd want *one* thing bad, an' I'm goin' to ask you to-night to do me a certain favor. Girls don't always tell their fathers such little things, but if any man was to make love to you I'd want—I'd hope, daughter, that you'd come an' tell me about it. Would that be askin' too much?"

"Of course I'd tell you," Anne said, seriously. "Do you think I'd keep such a thing from you?"

"Well, no; not now, anyway," Andrew said, in relief. "Let's go in. I feel chilly."

CHAPTER XI

THERE were mornings on which Anne rose very early and took walks before breakfast. She had risen earlier than usual one day. The sun was barely in sight above the mountain. The dew, in all the colors of a prism, was sparkling on the grass, and the boughs of the trees were festooned with crystal-coated cobwebs, as she went out, her head bared to the balmy air. Her walks usually led away from the village toward the mountains, and she was about to take this direction now when her eye happened to fall on a sheet of light-blue writing-paper pinned on the bark of an apple-tree near the front door. She went to it, curious to understand its import, and took it down. At the top of the sheet was a crude drawing in charcoal of a skull and cross-bones, and beneath was written in ink the following:

This house is marked by order of the Kuklux Klan in Konclave assembled. Complaints are in, all proved up, and duly filed. This house has become a menace to all Southern decency.

First proved charge: House is the nest of two traitorous devils that went to war against their own country, and shot down their own friends and even blood kin.

Second proved charge: House shelters a white-livered, soft-spoken, womanish rascal from the North who is prying around, meeting with niggers, speaking to them in public, and writing back lies out of whole cloth to Yankee papers about our mistreatment of the niggers and the low character of our best citizens.

Third proved charge: House sheltered for a day at least another white man called Foster, from the North, who made a

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rabid speech to the niggers at the Square and tried to produce a riot.

Fourth proved charge: House entertained, for two days, two other Yankees, who are believed to be concerned in some plot against us.

Fifth proved charge: House is the permanent headquarters, on a footing of social equality, of a nigger set free by the owner of the house. Said black scoundrel is going about making speeches and trying to produce uprisings among the niggers against the whites who are now sheltering and feeding them.

It is hereby ordered by the Klan that all these men be given notice by this writing that if they are found in this county on the midnight following the posting of this paper that they will, one and all, be dealt with in a manner that they deserve. To avoid bloodshed, the men mentioned are advised to leave at once. The Klan will come in full force *exactly on the hour of midnight. Mark this well, that no mistake be made.*

From the Kuklux Klan in Konclave assembled.

A chill of sheer terror passed over the sensitive girl as she read the ominous sheet. She folded it in her hand, undecided as to what course she should pursue. She thought of taking it at once to her father, but concluded that she would first think it over, and with this in her mind she passed out at the gate and started on her walk.

Turning a street corner, she saw Arthur Preston, a scythe on his shoulder, about to enter his meadow, where recently he had been at work cutting hay. To her surprise, he was reading a sheet of paper of exactly the same color and size as the one she had found.

Hearing her step and seeing her, he hastily folded the sheet and thrust it into the pocket of his coat. Their eyes met. His, she thought, had the appearance of shrinking from her own horrified stare. He bowed, flushed, lowered his scythe to the ground, and leaned on it.

"You are an early bird," he said, in what she felt to be an effort at lightness. "How are you managing to survive this hot weather?"

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She found herself out of mood for platitudes. The calamity hovering over her home was graver, in her eyes, than anything that had ever presented itself.

"I see you are reading," she said, trying to steady her tremulous voice. "You must get your letters early."

"Letters?" he repeated, helplessly. "Oh yes, it *is* early. I always get in a little work before breakfast."

Boldly she broke through his attempted evasion. "It was not a letter that you were reading," she asserted, bluntly. "I'm sure it wasn't. Now was it?"

"Oh, what does it matter?" he said. "It was something I happened to pick up, and having nothing else to do—anxious to shirk work, you know—I was glancing at it. Is your father at home, Anne? I want to see him this morning, if I can."

"May I see the paper you picked up?" she persisted, so gravely and firmly that he could not evade the piercing grasp of her eyes. There was nothing now for him to do, it seemed, but to comply, and yet he refused.

"I can't, Anne," he said, quietly, and in the tone of a man to a child. "There are a few things that men don't feel at liberty to mention to ladies. Let that suffice, please. I think I'd rather first see your father."

"What if I tell you that I have a paper like yours," she said. "I found mine on a tree in our yard. Where did you get yours?"

As she spoke she extended the sheet she had found toward him. She saw his countenance fall as he took the paper and unfolded it. The edges of the sheet fluttered, thus betraying the agitation he was trying to control.

"I see," he admitted. "It is the same as mine. I took mine down from your front gate as I passed just now. I was going to hand it to your father as I returned to breakfast."

"What do you think of it, Arthur?" She had not addressed him in that way since the war began, and its ut-

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terance now seemed to rise from the depths of sheer feminine weakness and surge unconsciously toward the masculine strength he represented.

He hesitated. She saw that he was striving to focus some comforting light on the situation. His eyes were averted from her face, his strong hand grasped the handle of his scythe as for mental support. He said nothing.

"You don't answer," her fear-filled eyes bearing down on him. "Arthur, why don't you tell me what—what ought to be done?"

Then he spoke. "I'm as helpless as you are, Anne," he confessed, fiercely, as if reproaching himself for his sheer lack of resources. "Anne, Anne, I'd give my life to save you pain or trouble, and I can imagine no trouble worse than this gruesome threat to a sensitive girl. What can I do? These men work in secret. I know who some of them are; in fact, I have already quarreled with them over their threats as to what they intended to do in this community. That shut me out of their confidence, and I am now in the dark as to their operations—their intentions."

"Their intentions?" she echoed, automatically. "They mention their intentions boldly enough on that sheet. Do you think they would dare to take such a step against my father, who served the Union and who now has the Government behind him?"

Arthur still failed to look at her. He shrugged his shoulders dejectedly. "It will do no good now, Anne," he said, "for me to attempt to show you the point of view of the Kuklux. You might think I was trying to justify them. It is true that the war in general is over, but these rough mountain men are untamed, unconquered, and they claim to be bent on having justice. The negroes are giving trouble everywhere under the encouragement of some designing Northerners. May I ask if you happened to see the article written by your friend—your admirer,

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Mr. Worthington, which was reproduced in the Augusta paper?"

"I have seen none of his articles," Anne replied. "He told me that he was writing for some papers, and I supposed that what he wrote was true."

"I won't argue about whether he is truthful or not," Arthur answered, coldly, "but that he is terribly indiscreet there is not a shadow of a doubt. The man who will bring this sort of thing down on the house whose hospitality he is accepting, when all other doors are closed to him, is—is—but I can't talk of him. I can't, that's all. He is your suitor. It would be unbecoming of me, of all men, to criticize him to you, and if I do so now it is because he is unwittingly, but stupidly, doing you and your father a lasting injury. When I see the sheer terror in your sweet face at this moment, and know that he is mainly the cause of it, I want to kick him out of the State, and I would do it if—if you had ever given me the right to protect you. That's what hurts—cuts to the quick! You know what I think of you, Anne. You know what I have suffered and am suffering on your account."

Like a flower in a storm, the stem of which was bruised, she stood almost swaying before him, beautiful in her blank, childlike helplessness.

"Please don't—don't, Arthur!" she faltered. "Everybody and everything is against us, and simply because my father stands for what he thinks is right. You needn't see him this morning. I'll show him this paper, and he can act as he thinks best. Do you think he will change his entire nature to please a gang of uncouth men who are too cowardly to come out in the open, but prowl about at night with ghostly caps and sheets on to frighten ignorant, superstitious negroes?"

"I can't answer you, Anne," Preston said. "I know only that on your account, as I see it, the situation is simply terrible. I feel that your father will be inclined to

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ignore this warning. He is a man of iron in one way, as his brother is in another, and, Anne, you are like them both. You are as pale as death, little girl, but you are undaunted. If you would persuade your father to take you away, perhaps—"

"Take me away!" She tossed her head defiantly. "I'd rather die than go under such dastardly orders."

"I know it," Preston sighed, "and that is why you are so dear to me, Anne. You will never feel toward me as I do toward you. I am not worthy of that, but my inability to aid you in this is killing me. As God is my judge, I don't know what to do, and yet something must be done!"

She made no answer, and he glanced toward the meadow as if to hide from her his passion-wrung features. It was as if she wanted to console him; her hand moved slightly toward his arm, but she checked the impulse, as if from pride. "I'll speak to father," she said, simply, as she turned away. "You have already done enough for us."

From the hillside, a little farther on, and hidden by the bushes from Arthur's view, she peered out and watched him as he moved across the meadow to the spot where, the day before, he had been at work. She waited for him to begin swinging his scythe, but he did not begin. Instead, she saw him take out the sinister sheet and stand reading it. Something in his attitude struck deeply into her consciousness. She felt a lump in her throat. She wanted to cry, but by sheer determination held back her tears and choked down the lump in her throat.

CHAPTER XII

SHE told herself that there was no time to lose, and she turned homeward. Passing Arthur's meadow, she saw that he was gone. He had come out with the intention of working for a while at least, but had already stopped, and for what other reason than the matter over which he was so disturbed? Presently she saw him ahead of her, walking rapidly toward his home. He had confessed that there was nothing he could do to help her, and to whom else could she turn? She thought even of her uncle, but gave that up at once as wholly unfeasible.

She found her father, Dill, and Worthington on the veranda. The latter had a manuscript in his hands and was making alterations in the text with a pencil. A glow of literary satisfaction was on his face, and he smiled as he bowed to her. She gave him a cold glance and turned to Andrew.

"Father, I must see you a moment," she faltered.

"Who, me? What you want with me, daughter?"

"Come into the parlor," she said, so gravely and with such a queer look that he rose promptly and followed without another word. In the parlor she faced him, drawing out the sheet of paper and handing it to him. "I found it on the apple-tree in the front yard," she said. "It is a serious thing, father. Read it."

Taking it to a window, he parted the curtains and read the warning through without glancing at her. When he had finished it he looked at her gravely.

"Breakfast is on the table," he said. "Go pour the

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coffee out for the others and come back. I want to look at this again. You say it is serious—well, it is.”

Automatically she obeyed. The formality of inviting the two men in to breakfast seemed such an empty triviality under the terrible pall of foreknowledge which hovered over her. Worthington smiled, as he always did in speaking to her, and playfully tapped his manuscript against his left hand. “This is another of my journalistic efforts,” he said, in a half-jesting tone. “They are not pretentious things, and are only sent to unimportant papers the editors of which I happen to know. This article here—”

“I don’t care to hear about it,” Anne said, coldly, and, as she spoke, she stepped forward and left him, taking her place at the head of the table.

She noted the blank expression of bewilderment on his face, and saw him awkwardly folding his manuscript and thrusting it into the pocket of his black cutaway coat. Anne served the coffee, and then as Mrs. Dill came and sat down she excused herself and rose.

“Father is not coming just yet,” she explained to Mrs. Dill. “He and I will have our breakfast together later.”

“But I wanted you to try some o’ my hot waffles,” Mrs. Dill protested, genially. “When you let ’em stand they get soggy, an’ they are as crisp and light as pie-crust now.”

“I’ll have some after a while,” Anne returned, with such a significant stare, and tone of detachment from the matter, that Mrs. Dill fell into thoughtful wonder over what might have happened.

When the two men had finished breakfast, and were going out to the veranda, Anne met them in the hall. “Father wants to see you both in the parlor at once,” she said, and when they had gone into the parlor she followed and stood at her father’s side.

Merlin was at the window, the blue sheet of paper in his hand. He stared at them gravely, his heavy brows drawn together. “Gentlemen,” he began, his usually steady

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voice betraying a slight tendency to quivering, "an important matter has come up, an' as it concerns you both, as well as me, I am obliged to call your attention to it at once. This warning from the Kuklux was found on a tree in the front yard just now. You'd better look it over."

He handed it to Worthington, who, wide-eyed and astounded, took it. They all stood watching him as he read. They saw a corpse-like pallor overcast his face. They saw the paper fall from his inert fingers and flutter to the floor, whence Dill picked it up. Worthington started to speak, but for a moment seemed unable to articulate. Presently, as Dill was reading the paper, Worthington found his voice.

"I presume that I am one of the—the offenders," he stammered, tremulously.

"I *presume* you are," Andrew took the word into his vocabulary. "I don't know what the nature of your articles are—that's your business, I reckon; still, as you are under my roof, and in my confidence, in a way, it seems to me that I ought to have been consulted about anything you sent forth in such troublesome times as these. You see, you are not supposed to be as good a judge as to what would be wise or unwise in dealing with these hard-pushed folks. Still, it is for you to judge whether you are abusing hospitality or not. I think you are. I know that I wouldn't 'a' done the like for any sort of price."

"I have not mentioned you or your family," Worthington all but gasped, "in any way except to praise you for your sterling loyalty. I—I—am sorry if I have offended you or Miss—"

"Thar is no time to talk of such small things now," Andrew declared, impatiently. "I know when a situation is serious, and this is as much so as any I ever tackled. It makes no odds how *we* look at it, the thing is how does that big secret body of furious outlaws look at it. They

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make out a good case ag'in' all of us on that paper. They don't know what you are here for; they don't know that them other three Yankees come on legitimate business with me, or that Joe is here for any but mischievous aims. I'm not so blind that I can't see the way these desperate men look at it, an' I want to tell you fellers that I feel it my duty to say that if you want to save your necks you had better leave before nightfall. Thar is no law to protect you; to send to the Governor for help would take more time than you've got, as slow as the trains are running now."

"Why, 'Drew," Dill cried. "I didn't intend to be in the way. I wouldn't 'a' come here for anything if I'd 'a' thought—"

"I know that," Andrew broke in, with a kindly look at his old comrade. "Don't forget that I invited *you*; don't forget that you an' your wife have been the greatest help to us that we ever had. I don't want to see you go, but you are here on account of friendship to me, you are in danger, an' I'm goin' to *make* you leave. Do you understand that, Mart? If you stay you'll be shot or hung, an' I'm not goin' to be responsible for it."

"Then you think that I—I—had better leave?" burst from the white lips of Worthington.

"If you'd rather be buried somewhar else, yes." Andrew gave him a cold, automatic smile. "I don't want to advise any man to back down under a threat o' this sort, but discretion is the best part o' valor, an' if that gang finds you still here they will be mad enough to act, an' act swift at that. As they see it, they have got an open-an'-shut, clear case ag'in' this house an' all it holds."

Mrs. Dill had crept into the room, and stood wiping her hands on a dish-towel somewhat behind her husband. She now spoke in a low, firm tone.

"You must go, Mart. You kin take the train for Chattanooga and wait thar till things settle down. I'm

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goin' to stay here with Anne—that is, if Anne intends to stay."

"Of course I'll stay," Anne answered, with a slight toss of her head. "This is my home, and I shall not leave it. You'd better stay, too. You and I have nothing to be afraid of."

"Chattanooga?" said Worthington, staring at Mrs. Dill. "Is there a train for that place to-day?"

"Yes, about two hours from now," Merlin answered. "You kin catch it, an' have plenty of time to pack."

There was a sound of rapping at the front door, and Mrs. Dill went out and admitted Joe. He was without hat or coat, and his shoes were untied. He held a sheet of blue foolscap in his hand.

"I found dis yer paper in my cabin," he said to Merlin, who reached forward and took it.

"It is the same as the one we got," Andrew said, glancing it over. "Joe, I don't want to mince words with you. You'd like to see the sun rise an' set a few more times, I'm sure. I advised you to quit that nigger public-speakin', but you wouldn't do it. Now my advice is for you to leave here to-day, an' git your mammy, an' take 'er back to your wife. You are doin' no good here—in fact, you an' a lot of others like you are doin' harm. The entire South is in grief an' despair, an' it is willin' to set to work to git straight ag'in, but the North is pourin' a lot o' human buzzards into it that are out for nothing but newspaper glory, mouth-spouting honors, or sordid gain. When Dill an' me fought we fought armed men for a livin' principle that had to be upheld, but we won, an' as far as I've seen Dill hain't once opened his mouth in unkind criticism of the folks we helped defeat. The whole trouble has come from other sources. These Kuklux think they had to organize, and I don't know but what they did have to."

With a strange, embarrassed glance at Anne, Worth-

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ington went to his room, evidently to pack his trunk. Joe left also. They heard him muttering to himself as he walked toward his cabin. The little family stood facing one another. Merlin put out his hand and touched Dill affectionately on the shoulder.

"I had to sort o' include you in a general way in what I said just now," he remarked, "for I wanted Worthington to realize the gravity of the plight he is in. Still, I think you'd better go to Chattanooga for a while, anyway."

"But what are *you* goin' to do?" Dill inquired.

"Me? I'm goin' to stay right here," Merlin returned. "This is my home. I own it."

"Oh no, father!" Anne cried. "No, no, no!"

"But I am." Andrew smiled, placidly. "I kin ax the rest of the men to go because they are in danger, but I'd rather die a thousand times than run off under such threats as this one."

"Oh, father, do you intend to stay—do you?" Anne pleaded, in a voice which had sunk to a piteous, terrified whimper.

"I must, child, I must! Don't make it any harder for me. I did my duty. I'm lamed. I'm only half a man, as men go; but I know what my rights are, an' no mob o' outlaws can drive me from what is my own by all law and reason."

Anne saw that he was immovable, and made no further effort to change him. She and Mrs. Dill left him and Dill together. Amanda was on the point of weeping.

"I hate to see Mart go off ag'in," she half sobbed. "But I hate more to think o' your pa. Anne, Anne, he is in danger—serious danger! Them men mean exactly what they say, an' when they come to-night an' find him still here there is no tellin' what they will do. They blame your pa for a lot o' things, an' he'll never explain 'em. He is too proud to do it. I wonder if Arthur Preston couldn't persuade him to go?"

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"Arthur Preston?" Anne echoed, with an odd, half-hopeful stare at the speaker. "How could he persuade him? He already knows of this. I talked with him about it. He was unable to suggest anything."

"Your pa might listen to him," Mrs. Dill answered. "Arthur is one person your pa believes in from the ground up. Your pa didn't tell you what happened at the Square t'other day, did he? He tol' me that he didn't want you to know it, because such things hurt your feelin's so much, but I think you ought to know this because—well, because Arthur done it."

"What was it?" Anne asked, now almost eagerly, as she bent to listen.

"Why, your pa was in the new grocery-store buyin' some things when a rough crowd gathered around him an' began to poke all manner o' insults at him. Half of 'em was drunk, an' they kept gittin' worse an' worse, till your father had stood about all he could. He tol' me he was losin' all grip on hisse'f because they was on the edge o' insultin' even you. Your pa tol' me he had his eye on a two-pound weight that belonged to the counter-scales, an' he was plannin' to throw it at the man that was sayin' the most, an' take the consequences, when all at once Arthur Preston hurried in an' faced the fellow. 'Git out of here!' he yelled. 'If you haven't any more backbone than to insult a lame man, come out in the street an' meet me. I'll make it interesting for you.' Your pa said that ended the trouble. The feller was one of Arthur's men in the war, an' he backed out, an' the crowd sluffed away like they was ashamed."

"Arthur has befriended him more than once," Anne said, wistfully. "Yes, father likes him, and Arthur admires my father, but he can do nothing now, for he is unpopular with the Kuklux. He refused to join them."

"I know, an' that was on your account, too."

"My account?" Anne said, in a low tone.

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"Oh yes, but what is the use to talk about it? You know he wouldn't join any body o' men that would be apt to injure your pa at any time. I'm sorry for Arthur, so I am."

"Sorry for him?" Anne's glance was on the floor, her sweet voice betrayed a forced, halting quality. "Why are you sorry for him?"

"Because I've got sense enough to know how he feels about you, that's why. If ever a man loved a woman that feller loves you. I saw him come out in his yard t'other day and look after you an' Mr. Worthington when you went for your walk. He stared a minute, an' then turned and went back into the house. That was enough for me. I cried. I tell you I busted out cryin'. I couldn't help it."

"You don't think I ever cared about Mr. Worthington, do you?" There was a world of significance in the question which Anne put in the half-breathless manner which had suddenly fallen upon her.

"No, I knew you didn't, but that didn't make you treat Arthur any better, an' he don't deserve it. He can't help the way his folks look at all these things. The war an' all your trouble has only made him love you more desperate an' tender."

It was significant that Anne made no reply. She turned away and went to speak to her father, who sat alone in the sitting-room. The sight of him in his helpless condition moved her almost to tears. She put her arms around his neck and rested her cheek against his tangled hair. "Father, you mustn't stay," she whispered.

"But I will stay; I must!" he answered, firmly. "Don't ask me not to. If they was ten thousand strong, an' had sent as many orders, I'd face 'em an' tell 'em what I think of 'em, too."

CHAPTER XIII

LONG before nightfall Worthington, Dill, and Joe had departed. The sun went down in blood-red glow beyond the mountains, and dusk—a sultry, dewy dusk—crept stealthily over the face of the land. And such a mockery of a nightfall it was to the sensitive Anne! All nature seemed so blind to the awful tragedy that was approaching. The fireflies were flitting over the damp grass; tree-frogs were shrilling in the branches of the trees; dogs were barking in the distance; chickens were going to roost beneath the house, noisily jostling one another as they sought their places for the night. Anne went as usual with Mrs. Dill to the stable-yard to help her milk the cow. Presently she saw some one climbing over the fence which separated her father's property from that of the Prestons. At first she thought it might be one of the Preston negroes, but it turned out to be Arthur.

A faint thrill of hope passed through Anne as he paused in front of her. "I want to speak to you, if you will let me," he said, tremulously. "I want to find out what your father is going to do."

She told him, calmly, of her father's decision and of the departure of the others.

"My God! surely, surely he won't stay!" Arthur exclaimed.

"Yes, he is bent on it:" Mrs. Dill rose from the side of the feeding cow, the tin pail in her hand. "We've done all we can, Captain Preston, but nothing will change his mind, nothing."

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Arthur stood staring at them through the dusk. "I see," he sighed. "I was afraid it would be so. You ladies are in no actual danger, but he is, beyond a doubt. I am helpless. I have ridden all day through the mountains, hoping that I might be able to turn this thing aside, but I have failed—dismally failed. The leaders all heard that I was seeking them and avoided me. I couldn't meet a single one, though I knew who they were. I'll go to see your father now. I'll furnish him with a fast horse, and beg him to go before it is too late."

"Yes, yes, see him—*please* see him!" Anne pleaded, her hand on Arthur's arm. "Talk to him; persuade him; show him the folly of staying."

Without another word Arthur turned toward the house.

"That boy will fetch 'im to reason if anybody can," Mrs. Dill said.

Ten minutes later they returned to the house, meeting Andrew in the backyard near the well. He had just drawn up a bucketful of water and was emptying it into the kitchen pail.

"You see I've started in to do Mart's work," he said, with a slow smile. "I'll have you plenty of wood cut for breakfast, that is, if—if—"

"Father, did you see Arthur?" Anne demanded.

"Oh yes—just now," Andrew answered. "Good boy, that one, I tell you! An' how he did spout! He almost got mad, he was so much in earnest. He wanted me to vamose the ranch. Shucks! the idea o' him advisin' me to do what he'd rather die than do hisse'f. I don't believe ten mobs like this un could drive that boy from his own domicile. He'd be shot to pieces rather 'n budge an inch at anybody's call, an' yit he can talk to me just the opposite. He went off sort o' desperate, I thought. I know what's the matter with 'im. This ain't no time to talk about it, Anne, but I know. He's always been a good

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friend o' mine, but thar is somethin' deeper even than that in it. Once while he was beggin' me, an' I was holdin' out, he put his hand on my shoulder an' bent down an' told me somethin'—well, never mind what he told me. Time will fetch it out, I reckon. But thar is one thing I'd like to say now before you as a witness, Mrs. Dill. I know that my life is in danger. I know powerful well that I may never see another day break, and naturally I'd like to have time to draw up some legal document about my effects—what I owe, and what I expect to sell; so I want to say this, Mandy, if I did have time to put my affairs into shape thar ain't a man North or South that I'd ask to administer on my property quicker than that very young feller. I'd make him Anne's legal guardian, for I know her interests would be safe in his hands, an' I believe he'd accept the trust, too. But that's too late now. I only thought I'd say that much to show my faith in the boy. I don't know what he may do to-night. Nothin' would surprise me, after what he said just now, an' the way he said it. Another thing, Anne. Worthington wanted to marry you—he told me so, but if anything happens to me, an' he comes back here, let 'im slide. I've sized 'im up. He won't do."

"Oh, father, don't talk that way!" Anne sobbed. "I never thought of marrying him. But what shall we do? Arthur knows you are in danger. You are. Those men won't have pity on you. You'll make them mad and they will kill you."

He took up the pail and swung it against his wooden leg as he turned toward the kitchen door. "We can't die but once," he said, calmly. "I can't run from these outlaws—I simply can't!"

CHAPTER XIV

ON a fresh horse, Arthur was again riding through the mountains. He was trying to discover the meeting-place of the Kuklux. But every effort was in vain. At every farm-house he found the men absent and the women ignorant of their whereabouts or stolidly non-committal. It was about ten o'clock when the last house he had singled out had been visited. He told himself that there was now nothing to do except to return to the village. He would go to Andrew's home and try to defend him. He felt that that was a duty that could not be put aside. He could not stand back and see that man murdered. He was well armed. He loved Andrew Merlin as a son loves a father, and he thought that it was likely that he would die by his side, for he was sure the outlaws would not be turned from their intentions by him, in spite of the service he had rendered the Confederate cause. He had witnessed exhibitions of their fury under protests of his on several occasions. They had determined to act to-night if their orders were not obeyed, and the orders had been spurned by their chief recipient.

Nothing would be done till midnight. He still had about two hours, but it would take time to ride the ten miles between him and the village. Suddenly he reached a point where another road led off to the right, and he remembered that it was the most direct way to General Merlin's plantation. He reined his horse in, and in his sweat-damp saddle sat reflecting. It was three miles to the plantation. General Merlin was no doubt at home. Why should he not go to him? He was in ignorance of

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the plans against his brother. If any man lived who could avert the disaster it was that individual. The general would be offended, for it had been said that he no longer acknowledged the relationship between him and Andrew. But what mattered that at such a time? Arthur hesitated no longer, but spurred his horse into a gallop. The still stars above a mountain-ridge in the west seemed to flit past the intervening trees as he sped through the cooling air, his hat in his hand, his hair swept back from his brow. Soon the plantation gates with their white posts and arches loomed up ahead of him. A negro on the lawn saw him and opened a gate.

"Is the general at home?" Arthur asked.

"Yas, suh, boss; but he's des erbout to go ter bed," was the answer.

"Well, tell him Captain Preston wants to see him at once." Arthur swung himself to the ground and led the horse along the walk in the wake of the servant, who suddenly turned to ask:

"Want yo' hoss put up, Marse Preston?"

"No, I'm going back at once. Hurry and tell the general that it is important."

Arthur stood holding his horse at the steps. He saw lights moving about in the bedrooms up-stairs, the entire lower part of the house being in darkness. He saw the negro enter the front door, and heard him call out to his master.

"A gen'man down here ter see you, suh—Marse Preston! He say he in er pow'ful hurry!"

"All right, I'm coming," was the answer. "Make a light in the parlor, Nero. Take his horse and invite him in."

The servant lighted some candles in the hall and in the parlor and came out and took charge of the horse. Arthur entered the hall and turned into the parlor, where he stood waiting, being too impatient to sit.

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"Well, well, Arthur, my boy, this is a surprise!" the general cried, warmly, as he came in and shook hands. "Welcome, welcome! Glad I happened to be up. In a minute I'd have been in bed. Did Nero put up your horse?"

"I can't stay, General," Arthur answered. "I am in a great hurry. General, the Kuklux are out to-night, and—"

"Oh yes, I suppose so. They were over the mountain two nights ago. Well, they are accomplishing a little something, after all. The negroes must be controlled; the Yankee carpet-baggers are nagging them on, so—"

"General, pardon me, but I must speak of something which I am sure must be unpleasant, and no time ought to be lost. The truth is, sir, they have warned your brother, my next-door neighbor, you know—"

"Don't! Don't mention him to me!" The general frowned darkly. "My best friends avoid that subject, Captain Preston. They know how I feel about him, and you must respect my wish also."

The two men stared at each other for a moment in perturbed silence; then the younger spoke:

"You must listen to me. You are my superior, General, but there are things, sir, that you ought to know."

"Not about *him*!" the general sniffed, angrily. "He has been a thorn in my flesh all my life, the shame of my family. I cannot express what I feel about his conduct during our great trouble, and since. Instead of settling down, when we all came back defeated, he has filled his house with meddlesome loafers from the conqueror's country, who spend their time making fun of us, inciting the negroes to riots, and publishing lies about us in Northern papers. People call his home 'The Negro Hotel,' 'The Radical Boarding-house,' and what not. He has lost all sense of shame and decency."

"Pardon me, General. I am exciting you, and I don't

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want to do so. I came to you for a *personal* favor. I don't know how to ask it, but I must. There is no one else to go to. I—I need you."

"Oh, well, that is different," Merlin said. "I would do anything I could for you. I've told you that often enough, Arthur. Your father was one of my best friends, and I feel, now that he is gone, that I want to be yours in a deeper sense than ever before. But why did you begin by bringing up the name of that—infamous brother of mine?"

"I *had* to do it," Arthur answered, simply, "for my personal trouble concerns *him*."

"Concerns *him*?" the general repeated, in perplexity.

"Yes, his life is at stake. The Kuklux have ordered him from his home by midnight to-night. All the others have left, but he refuses to go. They will kill him when they come."

General Merlin's fine, rugged face fell. He started to speak, but changed his mind. He turned aimlessly and walked to a window, and then aimlessly turned back again. He was growing pale, his lips quivered; he seemed to be battling against a torrent of long-wounded pride.

"Do you think they would go that far?" he asked.

"Yes, without doubt. He is stubborn; he will resist. He thinks he has rights—and he has, General, he *has*, and that mob recognize no rights except their own."

"Well, well, what is to be done? He brought it on himself. He has never listened to me. And—and you think they would—would actually kill him?"

"I'm sure of it, General. His worst enemies are in that band. They have planned his death several times. They won't be apt to fail to-night."

"Yes, yes, they hate him, I know that," the general said. "And you think I ought to try to stop them? Well, my boy, I simply can't. In many ways they have been my friends. They have confided in me, even as to their

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movements; for, after all, this, in a way, is justifiable warfare. The government is still persecuting us by allowing our broken-down country to be overrun by such cold-blooded, malicious rascals as we see every day about us. No, Arthur, I can't interfere. I can't. I have allowed this band to suppress other men who are no more at fault than my brother is. How can I—"

"Pardon me, but we have barely time to get there, General. If you won't come, I must go without you."

"You—surely you would not attempt to interfere?" Merlin cried. "You have already made an enemy of most of them—they've told me so—by refusing to join them. You won't be foolhardy—surely you won't."

"I'm ready to *give* my life up for it," Arthur said, so calmly and so positively that the older man bent closer and peered steadily into his face.

"What do you mean, my boy?" he asked.

"I mean, General, that his daughter is all that I care for on earth, and that I feel toward him as a son. I've loved your niece for years. She is the noblest, bravest, most unhappy girl I ever knew. I can't allow this gruesome thing to fall on her. She has already borne too much. It would kill her."

The general slowly withdrew his eyes and turned to the window again. It was as if he desired to hide from view his face in which weakness and strength were at war.

"So that explains it," he muttered. "Well, she *is* lovely; she is, she is, and I am sorry for her, and for you, too, Arthur; but still—"

"You must come, General." Arthur went to him and laid his hand on his arm. "You will regret it as long as you live if you do not try to save your brother's life to-night."

The older man was silent. Stepping into the hall and to the open door, Arthur called out to the negro in attendance:

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"Leave my horse standing, Nero, and saddle the general's fastest horse at once! Don't lose a minute—hurry!"

"All right, Marse Preston!" came from the darkness beyond the diminishing reach of the hall candle-light.

There was, for a moment, no movement in the parlor, then General Merlin came out. His hat, a pair of brass spurs, and a riding-whip were on the rack in the hall and Preston saw him reach up and take them down. Then he came on to the veranda, whence Arthur had gone to watch his horse.

"That's right, my boy, make me, *force* me!" he said. "I can't have my brother foully dealt with, lame and helpless as he is. Have we time to get there?"

"By fast riding, perhaps, General, if they don't arrive ahead of the hour set." Arthur was at the side of his horse, ready to mount.

"But why should they get there before the appointed time?" The general raised his foot to the balustrade, and with fumbling fingers began to buckle the wheeled spurs on his boots.

"A terrible thought has just come to me," Arthur answered. "The warning said that the male inmates of the house would be given till midnight to leave, but the Kuklux may have heard that your brother intends to stay. Such men are easily infuriated. In their rage they may already have gone to him, and you know what would happen."

"Yes, and we must hurry." The general stamped the floor with a spurred boot and raised his other foot. "Call to Nero. He's slow. Call him! I'll watch your horse."

Arthur bounded away in the direction of the stables. The next moment he returned, leading the general's horse and followed by the wondering servant.

"Tell your mistress that I sha'n't be home till tomorrow," Merlin ordered. "I shall spend the night at Captain Preston's."

CHAPTER XV

A the hours following sundown slowly passed, Andrew Merlin's house was a veritable abode of torture for at least one of the three persons remaining in it. Anne moved about as one in a nightmare. To go to bed was, of course, out of the question, so, in dim candle-light, the trio sat, when they sat at all, in the sitting-room. By ten o'clock all customary sounds in the village had died down. Merlin had little to say, but he had the aspect of a man fully resigned to whatever fate might be his. A loaded rifle stood in the chimney-corner, and several times the two women saw him glance at it, while a clouded expression of indecision crossed his face.

"Are you thinkin' about usin' that?" Mrs. Dill inquired, in a troubled tone, while Anne held her breath to hear what he had to say, for nothing so vital so far had been broached.

He fixed his eyes on the floor for a moment; then he said: "I've never thought I'd care to take human life, in any case; an' it seems to me now if I have to go to-night that I'd rather pass out of all this mess with clean hands—hands not red with the warm blood of a fellow-mortal; still, if—if one of that mob was to—to offer insult or harm to—to one of you two, an' I was able to do it, I'd shoot an' shoot to kill. That's why I think you both ought to go up-stairs in the far end o' the house, an' leave me here in front. I've got some'n' to say to 'em and it may make 'em mad."

"Leave you? How absurd!" Anne gulped. "I'll stay with you if they kill me."

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"They won't harm *you*, little girl, I know that," Andrew answered, softly. "But I'd feel better if you both would do as I say. I don't want a mob like that to think that I have you nigh for protection."

Nothing more on the subject was said. Anne went out on the veranda and looked away toward the mountains. She was sure she knew the road along which the band would come, and she bent her ears to listen. All was still in the distance. Only the ticking of the old clock on the mantelpiece in the sitting-room, which her father had wound, as usual, at dusk, broke the silence. Suddenly she heard the snarling revolution of the clock's brass wheels which always preceded its striking, and eleven harsh, heartless strokes rang through the house. One hour longer to wait, and yet the delay was worse than death. Through the window she saw the face of Mrs. Dill. It was a grim, heroic visage in its placid resignation. Half an hour passed. Anne strode back and forth on the veranda. Suddenly she heard the dull beating of hoofs on the stony mountain road. It was like the constant roll of thunder or the steady roar of artillery from a far-off battle-field.

She turned into the sitting-room. Her father's back was to her and he was sitting with his head lowered, his chin on his chest. There were times when he eased the pressure of his wooden leg by loosening the leather straps around his thigh, and he had resorted to this measure to-night. On Anne's entrance he looked up questioningly. Their gaze met in the flickering candle-light.

"They are coming! I hear them!" she announced, her lips seeming to produce the sound unaided by her tight throat.

"Are you sure?" her father asked.

"Yes, on the mountain road. They will be on time."

With no show of agitation Andrew tightened the straps about his thigh, tested their tension by sliding his thumb

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under them, according to habit, and, resting his hand on the back of his chair, he rose. Then he said: "I wish you both would do as I advised and go up-stairs som'er's. I want a word with them men. I've been wanting to get at 'em in a body for a long time. They don't know me. If they think I am afraid of their scarecrow garb they are badly mistaken."

"We are not goin', and that settles it," was Amanda's ultimatum. "If you've got a speech ready, so have I. I'll tell the triffin' scamps a few things they won't forget; that is if they don't gag me."

"No, you must stay quiet," Andrew commanded. "I'm running this house to-night, Mandy, and I don't want no woman to interfere."

Anne and Mrs. Dill went out on the veranda and stood close together. The hoof-beats were more audible now. The Kuklux had reached the level road leading into the village. Not a voice was raised, not an order given. Silence was well in keeping with their ghostly plan. Looking through the window, Anne and her companion saw Andrew now standing near the mantelpiece within an arm's reach of the rifle in the chimney-corner. The same thought crossed the minds of both, but neither voiced it. Presently they saw him take the rifle, tilt the muzzle downward and examine the tube and cap. Then, with it under his arm, he came out, crossed the veranda, and went down to the lowest step, where he stopped, and stood like a sentinel, the gun-stock on the ground, its long barrel in his right hand.

"What are you going to do, father?" Anne asked, in a flood of fear.

"Nothing unless they start it," he answered, grimly. "This is my home; according to law, it is my castle. I fought to uphold the law, and I may have to do it again. I'd rather you two would go in the house, but I don't want to use rough words to you at such a time, because I

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know you are stayin' on my account. Remember, I said I appreciated that, an' I want to say now that I have no words to tell you how I feel toward you both—you, Anne, as my daughter, an' you, Mandy, as a tried an' true friend an' the wife of a friend. May God bless you!"

The minutes crawled by. The band was now almost in view at the end of the street. There was nothing to do but to wait. Both of the women held the same fixed thought, that of protecting, if possible, the lame man before them. On came the horsemen. They rode in pairs, the leader aside from his fellows in front. Each rider wore a tall, white cap with large, frightful-looking eye-holes, and a white robe which fell in folds to his stirrups. There was no hope that they would pass without stopping. The leader, without a word of command, rode straight to the gate, and with a wave of his white-sleeved arm he directed the silent forming of the ranks on either side of him along the fence.

"Who goes thar?" Andrew suddenly called out, in a voice that was astoundingly steady, clear, and piercing.

A smothered oath escaped the mask of the leader. He was silent for half a minute. Then he said, aloud: "You'll find out who we are soon enough, 'Drew Merlin, if you haven't read the orders we left here. Where's the rest o' your nigger-lovin' bunch?"

"If you mean the friends that was here," Andrew returned, "I gave 'em their choice, and they decided to go. As for me, Buck Walker, I stayed on. I wanted you to know that you, nor no other livin' man or body of men, could order me away from my home an' succeed at it. I've tried to do my duty livin', an' I'll do it dyin'. I'm a good shot, as maybe you know, an' if a man in your cowardly gang enters my gate he will do it without a leader, for I've got the drop on you, an' I couldn't miss you if I tried. Halt! Hold still thar, Buck! Don't put

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your hand to your belt, or you are a dead man, as sure as God reigns in the skies!"

Andrew had quickly raised and cocked his rifle, and its slender barrel was aimed steadily. Not even a horse moved in the long line at the fence.

"So, so, that's your game, eh?" Walker was heard to say.

"Yes, Buck, that's my game." Andrew's gun remained steadily poised as he spoke.

At this moment a sound of hoofs was heard on the street leading from the Square. Walker turned his head and stared as a man on the scaffold might at some unimportant thing in the multitude that had gathered to see him hanged.

"I'd advise you to take your men off down the road, Buck," Andrew said. "I hain't goin' to stan' here the rest o' the night. You are the leadin' wolf in this pack, an' I may have to drop you fer the rest to feed on. Heigh, Buck, order that scamp at the end, on the left, to keep his hand still. I kin see out of the corner of my eyes, an' he may force me to pull my trigger. You may be ready to meet your God, but I doubt it."

The indirect order went into instant effect. If a man on the line moved, it was due to the restlessness of his horse. In a thunder of hoofs two approaching riders whirled into view. They dashed around the corner of the Preston place, and hastily reined their panting horses in close behind the others.

"Hello, 'Drew! What's all this?" General Merlin threw his bridle-rein to Preston, swung himself down to the ground and strode past Walker's horse through the gate. "Why, why, what's this?" he repeated, standing by his brother's side and facing the outlaws.

"You'll have to ask these fellows, I reckon," Andrew said, calmly. "Buck an' his mob have started to batter down my fence an' front door. I thought I'd try to halt

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one of 'em, anyway. Go in the house an' make yourself at home. If I can't show proper friendliness right now it hain't my fault. I'm sort o' busy receivin' callers that refuse to send in the'r cards."

"Buck, I see you've made a mistake." General Merlin's voice was as firm as his brother's. There was, indeed, an astonishing family resemblance in their voices. There was a resemblance, too, in their bodies, shoulders, arms, and heads, as they stood side by side in the vague starlight.

"We are after that free nigger an' them meddlesome white Yankees," answered Walker. "We come to see if they had left."

"Well, they are gone," General Merlin answered. "My brother is the only man here and he stayed to protect the ladies of his house. Before you go, Buck, I want you to take a message for me. I want you to tell all your friends here and elsewhere that General Merlin said that his blood is thicker than water; that he has only one brother and that he will stick to him as long as life lasts. We differ on politics, but the war is over, and as far as I am concerned that issue shall not separate us any longer. I know you thought you were doing your duty, Buck. You even thought that I was angry enough at my brother to condone what you had in view to-night, but I would not have done so. His helplessness here and now, against such odds, has shown me how I would have felt if he had been murdered by your lawless band. I shall not, from now on, favor your work at all. I see I cannot abide by it where my own flesh and blood are concerned, and I shall not where the flesh and blood of other men are concerned. You'd better go now. These two ladies no doubt are nervous, and the sooner our talk is over the better."

"I beg your pardon, General, and I beg 'Drew's and the ladies' pardon," Walker answered, submissively. "He is safe from now on. When it is understood that you are standing by him not a man in these mountains would

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dare touch a hair of his head. They know you and love you, General. Good night."

He turned and, followed by his wordless band, he rode toward the mountains.

General Merlin now held out his hand, and Andrew clasped it. "I thank God that I got here, 'Drew," the general said, huskily.

"You saved my life, Tom," Andrew returned, simply. "Thar hain't much left of it, but such as it is you saved it. I couldn't 'a' held 'em back a minute longer. I could watch one end o' that line, an' its centerpiece, but I couldn't watch both. My leg was wabblin' under me, an' my aim was gittin' shaky. On Anne's an' Mrs. Dill's account I'm glad you staved it off."

The general turned to Anne, who, limp and mute, still stood on the lowest step of the veranda.

"You must forgive me, too, my dear child," he said. "I know how dark your young life has been through all these bloody years, and I, and your aunt and cousins, will exert ourselves to make you happy from now on. Arthur and I— By the way, where is he? He was here just now."

"He took your horse home, to put it up, I reckon," Mrs. Dill broke in. "You must stay with us, General. You are tired, an' we have plenty o' room up-stairs."

"Yes, I want to stay," the general answered. He put his arm around Anne, drew her head to his shoulder, and kissed her. "I want to tell you something about Arthur Preston," he said, gently. "He brought this about to-night, Anne. If anything had gone wrong, he would have been miserable. Of all the young men I know—my own loved sons not excluded—he is the noblest, bravest, the broadest-minded young man I ever met."

"I'm glad you came—oh, so glad!" Anne all but sobbed. "I thought they were going to kill my father."

The general tenderly stroked her dew-damp hair back from her cold brow and said: "Yes, I'll stay with you to-

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night. It will be like old times. I'll run over and excuse myself from Arthur, and come right back."

When he returned, a little later, he found his brother waiting for him on the steps. "They have your room ready, Tom," he said. "I'm sorry this racket has kept you up so late. We'll let you sleep as long as you like in the morning."

The general turned toward the stairs. At the first step he paused, hesitated, and glanced over his shoulder. The candle he held to light his way up the stairs shone full on the gashed and lined face. It was as if he were about to say something of a more intimate nature than he had yet touched upon, but decided not to do so. In his room he stood still to listen. Down below he heard the closing of the front door, and then the steady thump of a wooden leg on the resounding floor.

"Can that be 'Drew, dear old 'Drew of our boyhood days?" he asked. "We are both near the end of things. What is left us now but love and sympathy—yes, and memories of our father and our mother?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE next day General Merlin returned home. The news of his reconciliation with his brother spread through the village and countryside. That he had sufficient reasons for so acting no one doubted, and the sharp animosity against Andrew and his daughter rapidly subsided.

Anne saw nothing of Arthur Preston for several days, but one morning, while on one of her early walks, she met him. He was riding a plow-horse to the field where he was at work. He was in his roughest clothes, and at the sight of her he colored to his hair with embarrassment. Lifting his broad-brimmed hat, he was about to pass her when she suddenly stopped him. "I want to see you a moment," she said, resolutely, and yet as much embarrassed as he.

Down he sprang from his horse, and with his hat in his hand stood beside her. "What is it?" he asked, redder now than ever.

"I want to say something," she faltered. "I've been wanting to see you to say it. I started to write several times, but—but of late I can't write as I like. My uncle told me that it was through you and no one else that he came that night. Arthur, you saved my father's life. You saved mine, too, for I was prepared to die with him. I am ashamed—I am ashamed to look you in the face and remember that, all along, I've allowed myself to—to be angry at you for the way your mother and sister acted. I now know you were never to blame for what they said

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or did. It was silly of me, but I couldn't help it. I was wrong, wrong, wrong! And all I can do is to beg you to forgive me. A new life has come to me since this trouble is over. I hated my uncle and aunt and cousins, but they have killed all my ill-feeling by kindness and love."

"Oh, Anne," he cried; "don't speak as if there were anything for *me* to forgive. That's absurd."

"Oh, but there is—there is!" she insisted, in the round, full voice of abject contrition. "You were kind to my poor mother; you were kind to my brother, to my father, and to me, and I treated you worse than a dog. I'll never forgive myself for it. Since the war you have not thought of yourself. You have lost all you had. You are now at work like one of your former slaves, and must be hard up like all the rest of us, and yet you have put yourself out to help me and my father out of serious trouble, and at the risk of losing your own friends, your own life!"

"Humph!" He half smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "Do I deserve any credit for it? I have never dared to say it, Anne, but I love you with all the soul that is in me. When I was away in the war there was not a day, not an hour—hardly a minute, that you were not on my mind. I was always afraid something was happening to you—lack of food, sickness, or death. I felt that you were in greater danger than I was. I was never afraid of being killed; I was only afraid that I would be kept from protecting you. God only knows how glad I was to hear that peace had been declared. I thought only of seeing you, for I had heard that you had survived. But when I got home and found that another man under your father's roof was taking from me all that made life worth living, then—then, Anne—"

"Don't mention that man to me," Anne pleaded, with eyes and face aflame. "I never cared for him. I felt, intuitively, all along that he was cold, calculating, and shallow. But I confess that I was so angry at your family

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and you, as fancied enemies of my father, that I wanted you-all to think that I cared for a Northerner."

"Then you really *didn't care?*" Arthur questioned, almost under his breath.

"No, and I was glad when he left."

Arthur had turned, and was leading his horse as he walked with her back toward the village. They were silent for several minutes. Suddenly, when the point was reached at which they must part, he said:

"I am going to ask you a plain question, Anne. I don't feel as if I can work to-day with the uncertainty on my mind. Do you suppose the time could ever come when you could feel toward me as I do toward you?"

"It can never come *now*, Arthur," she smiled, "for it came *a long, long time ago.*"

CHAPTER XVII

THE next day Arthur came to take Anne for a drive in the mountains behind a spirited young horse which he had just bought. And while he was waiting at the gate Andrew sat in the backyard under the shade of the apple-trees. When she was ready to go Anne tripped out to say good-by and kiss him, as she always did in leaving him, even for a short while.

"You needn't tell me whar you're goin'," he smiled, "or who with, as for that matter. I see his lordship at the gate. You needn't tell me any o' the rest, either, for I already know it. I see it in your looks, an' in his, too, even from here."

"You are very wise," Anne jested, her color rising.

"Yes, and what's more," he went on, "I seed it a-coming a long time ago. I didn't see how you two could keep apart always. I'm satisfied, Anne. If I had my pick of all the young men of my acquaintance, that one would have been my first choice. Fighting, as he did, on the other side from me didn't alter my opinion. He had to fight for his principles, as I had to fight for mine."

Anne kissed him suddenly, and then covering his eyes with her hands and standing behind him she bent and said in his ear: "Arthur wants to—to mention it to you and ask your consent, but it will not be necessary, will it? He is only natural, and he is a little bit timid, I think. May I tell him—"

"You may tell 'im that if he ever dares to darken my door I'll kill 'im," Andrew smiled. "I'll shoot 'im down

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like a dog. He ought to have better sense 'an to come here courtin' the daughter of a Union man, after the way he acted in the war."

"I'm going to tell him that you said it would not be necessary." Anne pulled his hair playfully and kissed his cheek. "May I? May I, father?"

"And *me*? What about *me*?" There was a bare hint of vague, unreasonable regret in the tone of the solitary man. "You'll give your old daddy up, eh?"

"Give you up?" Anne cried. "Arthur says he wants you with us always. Oh, father, I wouldn't marry if I had to leave you! I wouldn't! I wouldn't!"

"Well, tell 'im not to mention it," Andrew said, the corners of his mouth drawn in slightly. "Tell 'im I'm—tell 'im anything you like. You know what I think of 'im."

Andrew came in from the Square one day shortly after this. There was a triumphant look in his eyes and a steady blaze of content in his flushed face. He had a letter in his hand as he approached Anne, who sat knitting in the sitting-room. "Well, what do you think has happened?" he asked.

"I can't guess, father," Anne answered. "So many things are happening now all over the country."

"McCormack has accepted my offer. The deal is closed. The money is in the Atlanta bank to my credit."

"Oh, father, is it true?" Anne cried.

"Yes, no doubt of it," Andrew replied, fervently. "And it is all yours, child. You won't be a penniless bride, thank the Lord. Arthur will know how to handle it for you, after I'm gone. I'll rest satisfied on that score."

He left her quite bewildered with joy over the news, and went to inform Mrs. Dill of the transaction. He found her at the ash-hopper in the backyard, preparing

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lye for the making of soap and hominy. She took the announcement with the usual indifference of her class to matters so far removed from her own limited sphere of opportunity.

"It will be nice for Anne," she remarked, thoughtfully. "It looks to me like she is bein' rewarded at last for all she has been through."

"I was talking to my brother about Mart at the Square just now," Andrew went on. "Tom thinks he ought to come home. All animosity around here has died down. I've got a good farm with a house on it that I'm goin' to deed to you two. You kin make a good livin' on it. You an' Mart has got to share in my good luck, Mandy. I wouldn't be satisfied if you didn't. I sent Mart a telegram just now. He will be here to-morrow. You may count on it."

"Oh, will he? Will he?" She was taking no note now of her benefactor's statement in regard to the gift he was to make. She was thinking only of reunion with the life-long mate from whom she had been separated.

"Yes; he was ready to come, anyway, and he will hurry now," Andrew said.

She seemed speechless in her sheer joy, and, turning abruptly, he thumped away from her. The leather straps around his thigh creaked under the sudden strain as he swung himself along till he had reached his chair under the apple-trees. There he sat musing. He had much to think of—much that was past and gone forever, very little, somehow, that was to come, for his imagination was limited. He had lost his wife, with whom he had hoped to spend his last years. He had lost the son who he had thought would take his place and keep his name alive; and now, in a certain sense, he was losing his daughter.

. . . The honey-bees and bumblebees, with here and there a slim-waisted wasp or a golden yellow-jacket, made a drowsy, droning sound in his ears as they hovered

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over the rotting apples at his feet. . . . A gray house-cat, accustomed to his caressing hand, came and brushed against his living leg. Infinite peace descended upon him. Like ineffable light it lay all about him—on the fields, the hills, the mountains. It reached out to the horizon and beyond. He had won. In life's grim battle the triumph was his.

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